WITCHES

WITCH-HUNTING

AND WOMEN

SILVIA FEDERICI

Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women

Silvia Federici

BTL

COMMON NOTIONS

PM

Contents

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Introduction

Various factors have convinced me to publish the essays contained in this volume, even though they only trace the beginning of a new investigation and to some extent, at least in Part 1, propose theories and provide documentation already covered in *Caliban and the Witch.* One factor is the request often addressed to me recently to produce a popular booklet revisiting the main themes of *Caliban and the Witch* that could reach a broader audience. To this I must add my desire to continue to research some aspects of the witch hunts in Europe that are of particular relevance for understanding the economic/political context that generated them. I have focused on two in this volume, although I expect to continue this work with further research on the relation between women and money as constituted by the ideological campaign that accompanied the witch hunt, on the role of children as accusers and accused in the trials, and above all on witch-hunting in the colonial world.

In this book, I reconsider the social environment and motivations that produced many of the witchcraft accusations. In particular, I focus on two themes. First, the relation between witch-hunting and the contemporary process of land enclosure and privatization. This saw the formation of a class of land proprietors turning agricultural production into a commercial venture and, at the same time, with the fencing of the communal lands, the formation of a

population of beggars and vagabonds that posed a threat to the developing capitalist order. These changes were not purely of an economic nature but invested every aspect of life, producing a major realignment of social priorities, norms, and values. Second, I discuss the relation between witch-hunting and the increasing enclosure of the female body through the extension of state control over women's sexuality and reproductive capacity. The fact that these two aspects of the European witch hunts are treated separately does not imply, however, that they were separate in actual life, for poverty and sexual transgression were common elements in the lives of many women condemned as witches.

As in *Caliban and the Witch*, I reiterate that women were the main target of this persecution, because it was they who were most severely impoverished by the capitalization of economic life, and because the regulation of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity was a condition for the construction of more stringent forms of social control. The three articles that I have included, however, question the view that women were only victims of this process, stressing the fear they inspired in the men at the helm of change in the countries and communities in which they lived. Accordingly, the opening articles in this collection, "Witch-Hunting and the Fear of the Power of Women" and "Witch Hunts, Enclosures, and the Demise of Communal Property Relations," highlight the authorities' fear of women's rebellion and power of fascination, while "On the Meaning of 'Gossip'" traces the shift in the meaning of the word from its positive connotation of female friendship to the negative one that refers to malignant speech, alongside the parallel degradation of the social position of women spearheaded by the witch hunt.

Both of these texts are but an introduction to topics that require further inquiry and research. Other concerns,

however, have forced me to postpone a more thorough investigation. My return to the past has been constantly interrupted by the need to comprehend the causes of the new surge of violence against women that we are currently witnessing. In Part 2 of this volume I sketch a map of these new forms of violence and investigate their connection with the new forms of capitalist accumulation. This is the theme of "Globalization, Capital Accumulation, and Violence against Women," an article originally written for a forum on femicide held in Buenaventura, Colombia, in April 2016. Part 2 also includes an essay that I wrote in 2008 on the return of witch-hunting in many parts of the world in conjunction with developments that have paved the way to the globalization of the world economy.

More than five centuries have passed since 'witchcraft' appeared in the legal codes of many European countries, and women reputed to be witches became the target of a mass persecution. Today most governments in countries where women are assaulted and murdered as witches do not acknowledge the crime. Nevertheless, at the roots of the new persecution we find many of the same factors that instigated the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch hunts, with religion and the regurgitation of the most misogynous biases against women providing the ideological justification.

Since 2008, when "Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today" was first published, the records of the murders perpetrated in the name of witchcraft have swelled. In Tanzania alone, it is calculated that more than five thousand women a year are murdered as witches, some macheted to death, others buried or burned alive. In some countries, like the Central African Republic, the prisons are full of accused witches, and in 2016 more than a hundred were executed, burned at the stake by rebel soldiers, who, following in the footsteps of

sixteenth-century witch finders, have made a business of the accusations, using the threat of a pending execution to force people to pay.

In India, as well, the murder of witches is rampant—especially in the 'tribal lands,' such as the land of the Adivasi, where large-scale processes of land privatization are underway. And the phenomenon is spreading. We now have reports of murders of witches in Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Saudi Arabia. ISIS too has executed 'witches.' As in the sixteenth century, technology contributes to the persecution. Today, footage of the murder of witches can be downloaded from the internet, as can handbooks describing how to recognize a witch. It is also reported that some among the new self-appointed witch finders use computers as their tool for 'unmasking' witches!

One important change, however, with respect to 2008 is the growth of women's resistance against these new witch hunts. In India, above all, some women have mobilized, going from village to village to counter the rumors spread by local authorities, witch finders, and other more or less occult persecutors about the existence of witches. Others collect evidence and pressure the authorities, who are often uninterested in prosecuting the murderers. Slowly, information about the new witch hunts is also spreading in the United States, with attention so far concentrated on the witch camps that exist in the north of Ghana where hundreds of women have taken refuge, forced into permanent exile by people in their communities, including family members. While mostly journalistic in their reporting, the books and documentaries produced on this subject acknowledge the connection between these new attacks on women and the transformations brought about by the neoliberalization of African economies, which in many respects represents a process of recolonization. So far, however, the response to their findings has been muted.

An analysis of the new witch hunts, like an analysis of other new forms of violence against women, is in order. This requires a broad and sustained effort, as these phenomena now possess a global dimension. To spur this project, in New York we have created a website where similar initiatives can be brought together to exchange and circulate information, not only about the new forms of victimization but also about the new forms of resistance to it.

In the spirit of resistance, I conclude this introduction mentioning one more factor motivating my desire to think about the past and present of witch-hunting together—the commercial, touristic use made of the witch hunts in different European localities. Sites of famous trials and persecutions that led to the execution of dozens of women are now parading in shop after shop doll-like representations of witches. In a grotesque fashion these reproduce the very stereotypes that were created by the witch hunters and led to the deaths of thousands of women. On plates, towels, and coffee cups, as well as on the many dolls on sale for tourists, an ideology and a distorted history are propagated that will shape the imagination of new generations for years to come. Indifferent to the damage that this can produce, merchants of a fabricated history continue to display these outrageous items because, as a vendor told me in response to my protest, "They sell." This is also possible, however, because, with few exceptions,[1] European governments and representatives of the political class or the Church have not recognized the great crime that their predecessors have committed against women. No 'Day of Memory' has been introduced in any European calendar to remind us of the massacres of the witches. On the contrary, in some countries their burning has entered popular culture, as shown by the song (included in this volume) that is sung at every bonfire in Denmark on St. John's Eve.

For this reason, as for the others already mentioned, we cannot let the history of the witches be buried in silence, unless we want their destiny to be repeated, as is already happening in many parts of the world.

Denouncing the commerce made of women's bodies and their death to boost tourism is only a first step. Others will be needed to ensure that those who today profit from selling a degraded image of women, one that ignores the blood that was spilled and the pain that was inflicted, will take their dolls, cups, and towels, all sporting images of the ugly, sadistically laughing old witch, off their shelves.

Silvia Federici
New York, August 2017

Notes

1   One exception is Norway, where in 2000 the Vardø municipality decided to build a memorial to the victims of the witchcraft trials that were held in Finnmark. The task was given to a Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor, and to the French-American artist Louise Bourgeois, who built two different pavilions, the one by Bourgeois in the form of a burning chair. "Between 1600 and 1692, as many as 135 people were tried for witchcraft in Finnmark. Of these 91 were put to death after 'confessing' under torture. Most of them were women; eighteen per cent were men"; Line Ulekleiv, ed., *Steilneset Memorial: To the Victims of the Finnmark Witchcraft Trials* (Oslo: Forlaget Press, 2011).

PART ONE

Revisiting Capital Accumulation and the European Witch Hunt

Midsommervisen "Vi elsker vort land"

De tre første vers, som normalt synges ved bålfester
   The first three verses, which are normally sung at bonfire parties
Text: Holger Drachmann, 1885
Music: P.E. Lange-Müller, 1885

Vi elsker vort land,
   We love our country
når den signede jul
   when the blessed Christmas
tænder stjernen i træet med glans i hvert øje.
   lights the star in the tree with a sparkle in each eye.
når om våren hver fugl,
   when in spring every bird,
over mark, under strand,
   over field, under beach,
lader stemmen til hilsende triller sig bøje:
   lets it voice in singing greetings:
vi synger din lov over vej, over gade,
   we sing thy law over road, over street,
vi kranser dit navn, når vor høst er i lade,
   we wreath thy name, when our harvest is in the shed,
men den skønneste krans,
   but the most beautiful wreath,
bli'r dog din, Sankte Hans!
   will be yours, St. John!

Den er bunden af sommerens hjerter,
  It is tied by the hearts of the summer,
så varme så glade.
  so warm and so happy.

Vi elsker vort land,
  We love our Country,
men ved midsommer mest,
  but at midsummer most,
når hver sky over marken velsignelsen sender,
  when every cloud over the field sends the blessing,
når af blomster er flest,
  when flowers are most,
og når kvæget i spand
  and the cattle in bucket
giver rigeligst gave til flittige hænder;
  gives plenty of gifts to industrious hands,
når ikke vi pløjer og harver og tromler,
  when we don't plow and harvest,
når koen sin middag i kløveren gumler,
  when the cow munches its dinner in the clover field,
da går ungdom til dans
  then youth go dancing
på dit bud, Sankte Hans
  on your command, St. John
ret som føllet og lammet, der frit
  as the foal and the lamb, which freely
over engen sig tumler.
  tumble across the field.

Vi elsker vort land,
  We love our country
og med sværdet i hand
  and with sword in hand

skal hver udenvælts fjende beredte os kende,
   will every outlandish enemy know us,
men mod ufredens ånd
   but against the spirit of strife
under mark, over strand,
   under field, over beach,
vil vi bålet på fædrenes gravhøje tænde
   we will light the fire on the Viking graves of our fathers
hver by har sin heks,
   every town has its witch
og hver sogn sine trolde.
   and every parish its trolls.
Dem vil vi fra livet med glædesblus holde
   We will keep them from life with the fire of joy
vi vil fred her til lands
   we want peace in this country
Sankte Hans, Sankte Hans!
   St. John, St. John!
Den kan vindes, hvor hjerterne
   It can be won where the hearts
aldrig bli'r tvivlende kolde.
   never gets doubtfully cold.

Notes

"We Love Our Country" was brought to my attention by women at a feminist gathering in Copenhagen, who also provided the translation reproduced in this volume. The reading generated an important discussion on the effects of the domestication of the figure of the witch and the concealment of the extermination of thousands of women in European history and culture. In Denmark, witch trials took place especially in the seventeenth century, with a peak in the period between 1617 and 1625, when in the space of eight years there were 297 trials, the highest concentration in any country in Europe. Here too most of those charged were women. Jens Christian V. Johansen, "Denmark: The Sociology of Accusations," in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 339–66.

Why Speak of the Witch Hunts Again?

Why should we speak of the witch hunts again? 'Again,' given that in recent years feminist scholars have lifted the witch hunt from the historical limbo to which it was confined and assigned it a proper place in the history of women in modern Europe and the Americas.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, Mary Daly, and Carolyn Merchant,[1] among others, have shown how the witch hunts served to deprive women of their medical practices, forced them to submit to the patriarchal control of the nuclear family, and destroyed a holistic concept of nature that until the Renaissance set limits on the exploitation of the female body.

More than that. Under the influence of the *Nouvelle histoire*, village archives have been reopened and cartons of dusty records have been reexamined, making a more detailed picture of hundreds of trials available to us.

Why, then, stir old ashes, particularly if we are not ready to bring new facts to bear on the current interpretative frameworks?

A reason for doing so is that there are important structural aspects of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch hunts that still need to be analyzed and placed in the appropriate sociohistorical context. Most historians of the witch hunt, even the most politically inspired, have confined themselves to sociological analyses: Who were

the witches? What were they accused of? Where and how they were punished? Or they have viewed the witch hunt from a limited angle: the birth of the medical profession, the development of the mechanical view of the world, the triumph of a patriarchal state-structure, and so forth.

What has remained unacknowledged is that, like the slave trade and the extermination of the indigenous populations in the 'New World,' *the witch hunt stands at a crossroad of a cluster of social processes that paved the way for the rise of the modern capitalist world.* Thus, there is much that can be learned from it concerning the pre-conditions for the capitalist takeoff.

A study of the witch hunt makes us reassess the entrenched belief that at some historical point capitalist development was a carrier of social progress, which in the past has led many 'revolutionaries' to bemoan the absence of a 'genuine capitalist accumulation' in much of the former colonial world. But if my reading of the witch hunt is correct, then a different historical understanding becomes possible, whereby the African slaves, the expropriated peasants of Africa and Latin America, and the massacred native population of North America become the kin of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European witches, who, like them, saw their common lands taken away, experienced the hunger produced by the move to cash crops, and saw their resistance persecuted as a sign of a diabolical pact.

But, it may be objected, what proof do we have that there exists a connection between the woman who was burned at the stake or raised her pitchfork against the tax collector and the logic of a system that in its initial phase could hardly have achieved a unified consciousness, much less an orchestrated plan? How is it possible to see in the murderous village squabbles that brought many women to torture chambers the signposts of a new world economic

order of which none of the protagonists could have had a clue? Should we not, then, confine ourselves to micro-histories that programmatically cut off village events from any links with overarching social structures?

This may appear a prudent course. But restricting the causal field only leads to new questions. For instance, Why do we witness a surge of patriarchal, misogynist practices at the very inception of the modern world at the initiative of the same bourgeoisie that is often credited with being an agent of women's emancipation? And what is the relationship between the birth of the medical profession and the rise of the philosophical and scientific mechanism? Isn't a broader underlying cause called for, connecting and explaining all these different correlations?

Answering these questions is the path that I have taken. In my work, the witch hunt is read as an aspect of the 'Great Transformation' that led to the establishment of capitalism in Europe. True, the evidence is circumstantial, but no significant historical phenomenon can ever be 'explained' except by reference to a contextual field, as well as to its internal dynamics.

One example drawn from the present can clarify this point. In the absence of the abundant supply of records that we are likely to pass on to future generations, historians studying the 1980s and 1990s in the U.S. might be baffled by the coexistence of an unprecedented technological development and the return of phenomena that are usually associated with 'underdevelopment' or with a previous age of primitive accumulation: homelessness, the large-scale confinement of black people in the nation's jails, patterned on the 'Great Confinement' of the seventeenth century, widespread illiteracy, the spread of anonymous violence, and a broad pattern of social disintegration. How to prove, then, that the same capitalist expansion that has led to the computer revolution has

also been responsible for the return to forms of life that recall the 'Iron Century'?

Much circumstantial evidence would be necessary. Scores of interviews with government officers and the diaries of computer whiz kids, for example, or the work of intellectuals engaged in 'deconstructing' literary texts or hailing the age of 'postmodernist discourse' would not be enough! One would have to study housing policies, connect rent increases with the dismantling of America's industrial belt, deduce from it a leap in accumulation, leading to the development of new technological know-how and the pauperization of large sectors of the working class, infer the tensions that this produced, listen to the speeches of politicians bent on attacking welfare as a perversion of social and divine goals. Even with all this, such efforts might still be met with skepticism, just as they are today. The witch hunt too then must be rescued from the isolation of the village and placed in a broader frame. It needs to be examined on a continuum with other events and processes unfolding at both the village and the national level. This, I hope, is what my work has accomplished.

Notes

This article was written in the late 1990s, as the first version of the introduction for *Caliban and the Witch*.

1   Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Methaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press, 1973); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

Witch Hunts, Enclosures, and the Demise of Communal Property Relations

This chapter argues that the English enclosures, and more broadly the rise of agrarian capitalism, starting in late fifteenth-century Europe provide a relevant social background for understanding the production of many contemporary witchcraft accusations and the relation between witch-hunting and capital accumulation. I will clarify later in what sense I use the concept of enclosure. Here I wish to stress that land enclosures cannot explain the totality of the witch hunts, past or present. I agree with the prevailing view that witch-hunting requires a multi-causal explanation, though I trace all of its underlying motivations to the development of capitalist relations. I also do not wish to suggest that the connection I establish between land enclosure and witch-hunting is a necessary one. It is only under specific historical conditions that land privatization produces a persecution of 'witches.' There seems to be, however, a peculiar relationship between the dismantling of communitarian regimes and the demonization of members of the affected communities that makes witch-hunting an effective instrument of economic and social privatization. To identify this peculiar relationship is part of the purpose of this chapter.

Enclosures were an English phenomenon whereby landlords and well-to-do peasants fenced off the common lands, putting an end to customary rights and evicting the

population of farmers and squatters that depended on them for their survival. This was not the only means by which land privatization took place. The same process of expulsion of the peasantry and commercialization of land occurred in France and other parts of Western Europe, for instance, through increased taxation. I focus, however, on the English enclosures, because they more clearly show how the commercialization of land and the rise of monetary relations affected women and men differently. In this usage, enclosures include the engrossment of land, the introduction of rack rents, and new forms of taxation. But in all its forms this was a violent process, causing a profound polarization in what had previously been communities structured by reciprocal bonds. That it was not only the lords but the well-to-do among the peasants who raised the edges (the common form of boundary marking) intensified the hostilities the enclosures produced, as the enclosers and the enclosed knew each other, walked the same paths, and were connected by multiple relations, and the fear that consumed them was fueled by the proximity of their lives and the possibility of retaliation.

What evidence do we have that land enclosure is a major factor in the production of witch hunts?

The answer is that most of the evidence is circumstantial. In none of the trials of which we possess the records were the women accused described as victims of expropriation. It is acknowledged, nevertheless, that, as in the rest of Europe, in England witch hunts were predominantly a rural phenomenon and, as a tendency, they affected regions in which land had been or was being enclosed. Although he later retracted his claim, in his *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* Alan Macfarlane had shown that the map of the witch trials and that of the enclosures coincided, the main area for the persecution being the county of

Essex, where the land had been enclosed at least a century before the witch hunt.[1] Enclosures had also occurred in Lancashire, especially near Pendle Forest, the site, in 1612, of one of the most murderous witchcraft prosecutions. The memory of this enclosure was reflected in the name of the village where some of the witches executed were first examined, which was properly called 'Fence.'

Chronological considerations are also important. They show that witch trials did not begin in England until the sixteenth century, peaking in the seventeenth, and that they occurred in societies where economic and social relations were being reshaped by the growing importance of the market, and where impoverishment and rising inequalities were rampant, all becoming harrowing in the 1580–1620 period, when, under the impact of the silver coming from South America, the prices of grain and other agricultural goods began to rise.

Older women were most affected by these developments, for the combination of rising prices and the loss of customary rights left them with nothing to live on, especially if they were widows or had no children capable of or willing to help them. In the rural economy of the English manorial society, widows and poor people in general had been provided for.

As Keith Thomas has written in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*:

> The old manorial system had done much to cater for widows and elderly people by a built-in system of poor relief. The widow enjoyed the right of free-bench, that is, of succession to a portion of her late husband's holding, ranging from a quarter to the whole, according to local manorial custom. Should she be incapable of cultivating it herself, she could surrender it to a younger member of the family in

return for a guarantee of maintenance. . . . [There] were also various local customary privileges of the poor, varying from the right of three days of gleaning before the stubble was given over to pasture . . . to permission to sleep in the church if they had no other accommodation.[2]

Peter Linebaugh has also shown that since the Magna Carta, and in particular the Charter of the Forest of 1215, the widow's right to 'estovers,' that is, the right to food, wood, and sustenance, was guaranteed.[3] But with the loss of customary rights this too was forfeited, at the very time when the Reformation and the new commercial spirit forbade the giving and receiving of charity, begging being allowed in England only upon concession of a license by the justices of the peace.

Not surprisingly, many so-called witches were poor women, who survived on begging from door to door or lived off the 'poor rates,' as the first system of welfare introduced in England was called. Even the crimes imputed to them demonstrate that that they were part of a peasant population that no longer had access to land or customary rights and could be expected to resent their neighbors' possessions, beginning with their animals, which may have been grazing on land that had once been a common. Significantly, at least one-third of the charges recorded by C. L'Estrange Ewen relative to the Home Circuit for the period between 1563 and 1603 were for bewitchment of pigs, cows, horses, geldings, and mares, several to death.[4] As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch*, the poverty of the 'witches' was noted in the accusations, as it was said that the Devil came to them in times of need and promised them that from that point onward "they should never want," presumably offering "meat, clothes, and money" and payment of their debts.[5]

Poverty, however, was not the immediate cause of witchcraft charges

Two other factors contributed to the making of a witch. First, witches were not only victims. They were women who resisted their impoverishment and social exclusion. They threatened, cast reproachful looks, and cursed those who refused them help; some made nuisances of themselves by sudden, uninvited appearances on their better-off neighbors' doorsteps or made uncalled for attempts to have themselves accepted by giving small gifts to children. Those who prosecuted them charged them with being quarrelsome, with having an evil tongue, with stirring up trouble among their neighbors, charges that historians have often accepted. But we may wonder if behind the threats and the evil words we should not read a resentment born of anger at the injustice suffered and a rejection of marginalization.

To the economic factors that are in the background of witchcraft accusation we must add the increasingly misogynous institutional policy that confined women to a subordinate social position with respect to men and severely punished any assertion of independence on their part and any sexual transgression as a subversion of the social order. The 'witch' was a woman of 'ill repute,' who in her youth had engaged in 'lewd,' 'promiscuous' behavior. She had often had children out of wedlock, and her demeanor contradicted the model of femininity that through the law, the pulpit, and the reorganization of the family was imposed on the female population of Europe during this period. At times she was a healer and practitioner of various forms of magic that made her popular in the community, but this increasingly signaled her as a danger to the local and national power structure in its warfare against every form of popular power. Whether their remedies had any efficacy, possibly based on empirical

knowledge of the properties of herbs and plants, or were placebos made of charms and incantations is not relevant here.

That the populace tried to influence the course of events through sorcery and other dubious practices was enough of a threat at a time when enclosures sparked revolts and turned farmers into vagabonds and beggars, plausibly eager to turn the world upside down, and women participated in many protests, pulling up the fences that now surrounded the commons.[6] In the witch the authorities simultaneously punished the attack on private property, social insubordination, the propagation of magical beliefs, which presumed the presence of powers they could not control, and the deviation from the sexual norm that now placed sexual behavior and procreation under the rule of the state.

That the Devil had to be called up to justify the operation remains baffling, unless we assume that only through their demonization could forms of behavior that in the past had been tolerated or viewed as normal be rendered odious and frightening in the eyes of a broader population of women, to whom the death of the witch served as a lesson of what to expect should they follow her path. And indeed many women learned the lesson and as the witch hunt progressed also contributed to the accusations. Yet they rarely denounced the women suspected of witchcraft directly, playing instead a 'passive role,' being pressured to testify by men, who usually initiated the legal procedures.[7]

It is perhaps through this confrontation, opposing women to women, that we discover the secret of the persecution of the witches and its peculiar relationship to the destruction of the commons.

It is fashionable among historians today to assume that those who were killed were not innocent victims of a monstrous institutional persecution that was similar to

the extermination of the heretics or the Nazi persecution of the Jews in modern times. We are also told that some women took pride in their reputation as witches to extort favors and resources from their neighbors. It is suggested that charges such as spoiling ale-making, bewitching the cow, or causing the sudden death of children were not unsubstantiated. But if indeed there were women who readily committed such deeds, shouldn't we ask what drove them to so fiercely hate some of their neighbors as to plot to ruin them economically by killing their animals, spoiling their trades, and inflicting deadly torments on them? How do we explain that in villages, where a century earlier life had been organized around communal structures and whose yearly calendar had been punctuated by collective festivities and celebrations, such hatreds had arisen? Or was the demonization of the 'witch' the very instrument of these divisions, necessary precisely to justify the ban against individuals who once had been considered and had considered themselves as commoners?

Be that as it may, together with the 'witches,' a world of social/cultural practices and beliefs that had been typical of precapitalist rural Europe, but which had come to be viewed as unproductive and potentially dangerous for the new economic order, was wiped out. It was a world that we now call superstitious but that at the same time alerts us to the existence of other possibilities in our relationship to the world. In this sense, we have to think of the enclosures as a broader phenomenon than simply the fencing off of land. We must think of an enclosure of knowledge, of our bodies, and of our relationship to other people and nature.

Another aspect that has yet to be fully understood is how the witch hunt changed our relationship to animals. With the rise of capitalism a new social ethos developed that prized the capacity to discipline and channel

one's instinctual desires into labor power. As self-control became the mark of humanity, a more profound differentiation was introduced between humans and the 'beasts,' amounting to a cultural revolution if we consider that before the advent of capitalism a continuity was assumed between the animal and human worlds, animals often being deemed responsible beings who were even endowed with the capacity to speak. As late as the sixteenth century this view of animals persisted in many parts of Europe, so that dogs, for instance, were brought to trials for 'crimes' they had committed or as witnesses in trials for their owners, capable to assert, with their behavior, their innocence or guilt.[8]

By the seventeenth century a drastic change was underway, reflected in Descartes's theory that animals are nonsentient machines. Having companion animals was increasingly treated with suspicion, animals being depicted as the embodiment of that uncontrollable instinctuality that capitalism had to curb to produce a disciplined worker. Touching them, caressing them, living with them, as had been the norm in rural areas, became taboo. With the witch hunt, especially in England, animals were demonized, according to the theory that the Devil provided his acolytes with daily helpers in the form of domestic pets, serving to carry out the witches' crimes. These 'familiars' are a constant theme in the English trials, as evidence of the irrational, bestial nature of the 'witch' and potentially every woman.

Through the witch hunts, then, a new social and ethical code was imposed that made any source of power independent of state and Church suspect of diabolism and brought the fear of hell—the fear of absolute evil upon the earth. That its embodiment was commonly assumed to be a woman was to have profound consequences for the condition of women in the capitalist world that the witch

hunts helped to construct. It divided women. It taught them that by becoming accomplices of the war against the 'witches' and accepting the leadership of men in this regard they could acquire the protection that would save them from the hangman or the stake. It taught them above all to accept the place assigned to them in the developing capitalist society, for once it was accepted that women could become servants of the Devil, suspicion of diabolism would accompany a woman every moment of her life.

Notes

1   Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional Comparative Study* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
2   Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 562.
3   Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 29, 39–40.
4   C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witch-Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes Held for the Home Circuit AD 1559–1736* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929).
5   See Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 520.
6   On women as participants in anti-enclosure struggles, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004), 73.
7   Clive Holmes, "Women: Witnesses and Witches," *Past and Present* 140, no. 1 (August 1993): 54, 58. Holmes writes that "women, despite their numerical involvement, were largely passive actors in the legal process against witches," for "the effective decision to transmute village suspicion into official testimony, and to organize their neighbours for this, was taken by local *men*."
8   See Edward Payson Evans, *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals: The Lost History of Europe's Animal Trials* (London: William Heineman, 1906).

Witch-Hunting and the Fear of the Power of Women

She stands alone, in the twilight, in an empty space, holding in her hands a skein of blue yarn that weaves around her to embrace a cluster of homes, which, because of this, appear almost as a continuation of her body. *Trazando el Camino* (1990) is among the many paintings that Rodolfo Morales, one of Mexico's best twentieth-century artists, has dedicated to the main theme of his work: the female body as the material and social fabric holding the community together. Morales's painting is a counterpoint to the image of the witch, as with her quiet look and embroidered apron the woman it represents looks almost angelic. Yet something magical and secretive about her recalls the female 'conspiracy' that was the historical justification for the witch hunts that bloodied Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, perhaps providing a clue to some of the mysteries at the heart of this persecution that historians have yet to solve.

Why were the witch hunts primarily directed against women? How does one explain that for three centuries thousands of women in Europe became the personification of 'the enemy within' and absolute evil? And how to reconcile the all-powerful, almost mythical portrait that inquisitors and demonologists painted of their victims—as creatures of hell, terrorists, man-eaters, servants of the Devil wildly riding the skies on their broomsticks—with

the defenseless figures of the actual women who were charged with these crimes and then horribly tortured and burned at the stake?

A first answer to these questions traces the persecution of the 'witches' back to the dislocations caused by the development of capitalism, in particular the disintegration of the communal forms of agriculture that had prevailed in feudal Europe and the pauperization into which the rise of a monetary economy and land dispossession plunged broad sectors of both the rural and urban populations. According to this theory, women were those most likely to be victimized because they were the most 'disempowered' by these changes, especially older women, who often rebelled against their impoverishment and social exclusion and who constituted the bulk of the accused. In other words, women were charged with witchcraft because the restructuring of rural Europe at the dawn of capitalism destroyed their means of livelihood and the basis of their social power, leaving them with no resort but dependence on the charity of the better-off at a time when communal bonds were disintegrating and a new morality was taking hold that criminalized begging and looked down upon charity, the reputed path to eternal salvation in the medieval world.

This theory, first articulated by Alan Macfarlane in his *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970), certainly applies to many witch trials. There is undoubtedly a direct relation between many cases of witch-hunting and the process of the 'enclosures,' as demonstrated by the social composition of the accused, the charges made against them, and the common characterization of the witch as a poor old woman, living alone, dependent on donations from her neighbors, bitterly resenting her marginalization, and often threatening and cursing those who refused to help her, who inevitably accused her of being responsible

for all their misadventures. This picture, however, does not explain how such wretched creatures could inspire so much fear. It also does not account for the fact that many among the accused were charged with sexual transgressions and reproductive crimes (such as infanticide and causing male impotence), and among the condemned there were women who had achieved a certain degree of power in the community, working as folk healers and midwives or exercising magical practices, such as finding lost objects and divination.

Besides resistance to pauperization and social marginalization, what threats did 'witches' pose in the eyes of those who planned to exterminate them? Answering this question requires that we recapture not only the social conflicts that the development of capitalism generated, but its radical transformation of every aspect of social life, beginning with the reproductive/gender relations that had characterized the medieval world.

Capitalism was born out of the strategies that the feudal elite—the Church and the landed and merchant classes—implemented in response to the struggles of the rural and urban proletariat that by the fourteenth century were placing their rule in crisis. It was a 'counterrevolution,' not only suffocating in blood the new demands for freedom but turning the world upside down through the creation of a new system of production requiring a different conception of work, wealth, and value that was useful for more intense forms of exploitation. As such, from its inception the capitalist class was confronted with a double challenge. On one hand, it had to defeat the threat posed by the expropriated commoners turned vagabonds, beggars, and landless laborers ready to revolt against the new masters, especially in the period between 1550 and 1650, when inflation caused by the arrival of gold and silver from the

New World "was accelerating to uncontrollable proportions," causing food prices to skyrocket, while wages were correspondingly declining.[1] In that context, the presence in many peasant communities of old women, resentful of their dismal state, going from door to door muttering words of vengeance, could certainly be feared as a breeder of conspiratorial plots.

On the other hand, as a mode of production positing 'industry' as the main source of the accumulation, capitalism could not take hold without forging a new type of individual and a new social discipline boosting the productive capacity of labor. This involved a historic battle against anything posing a limit to the full exploitation of the laborer, starting with the web of relations that tied the individuals to the natural world, to other people, and to their own bodies. Key to this process was the destruction of the magical conception of the body that had prevailed in the Middle Ages, which attributed to it powers that the capitalist class could not exploit, that were incompatible with the transformation of the laborers into work machines, and that could even enhance their resistance to it. These were the shamanic powers that precapitalist, agricultural societies have attributed to all or to special individuals, and that in Europe survived despite centuries of Christianization, often being assimilated into Christian rituals and beliefs.

It is in this context that the attack on women as 'witches' should be located. Because of their unique relation to the process of reproduction, women in many precapitalist societies have been credited with a special understanding of the secrets of nature, presumably enabling them to procure life and death and discover the hidden property of things. Practicing magic (as healers, folk doctors, herbalists, midwives, makers of love-philters) was also for many women a source of employment and

undoubtedly a source of power, although it exposed them to revenge when their remedies failed.

This is one reason why women became the primary targets in the capitalist attempt to construct a more mechanized conception of the world. The 'rationalization' of the natural world—the precondition for a more regimented work discipline and for the scientific revolution—passed through the destruction of the 'witch.' Even the unspeakable tortures to which the accused women were subjected acquire a different meaning when we conceive them as a form of exorcism against their powers.

In this context we must also reconsider the portrayal of women's sexuality as something diabolical, the quintessence of female 'magic,' which is central to the definition of witchcraft. The classic interpretation of this phenomenon blames it on the inquisitors' sexual prurience and sadism born out of their repressive ascetic lives. But, although the participation of ecclesiastics in the witch hunt was fundamental to the construction of its ideological scaffold, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the witch hunt was most intense in Europe, the majority of witch trials were conducted by lay magistrates and paid for and organized by city governments. Thus, we must ask what female sexuality represented in the eyes of the new capitalist elite in view of their social-reformation project and institution of a stricter discipline of labor.

A preliminary answer, drawn from the regulations introduced in most of Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with regard to sex, marriage, adultery, and procreation, is that female sexuality was both seen as a social threat and, if properly channeled, a powerful economic force. Like the Fathers of the Church and the Dominican authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486),[2] the nascent capitalist class needed to degrade female sexuality and pleasure. Eros, sexual attraction, has

always been suspect in the eyes of political elites, as an uncontrollable force. Plato's account of the effects of love in the *Symposium* gives an ontological dimension to this view. Love is the great magician, the demon that unites earth and sky and makes humans so round, so whole in their being, that once united they cannot be defeated. The Fathers of the Church, who in the fourth century AD went to the African desert to escape the corruption of urban life and presumably the enticements of Eros, had to acknowledge its power, being tormented by a desire that they could only imagine to be inspired by the Devil. Since that time, the need to protect the cohesiveness of the Church as a patriarchal, masculine clan and to prevent its property from being dissipated because of clerical weakness in the face of female power, led the clergy to paint the female sex as an instrument of the Devil—the more pleasant to the eye, the more deadly to the soul. This is the leitmotif of every demonology, starting with the *Malleus Maleficarum*, possibly the most misogynous text ever written. Whether Catholic, Protestant, or Puritan, the rising bourgeoisie continued this tradition, but with a twist, as the repression of female desire was placed at the service of utilitarian goals such as the satisfaction of men's sexual needs and more importantly the procrea-tion of an abundant workforce. Once exorcised, denied its subversive potential through the witch hunt, female sexuality could be recuperated in a matrimonial context and for procreative ends.

Compared with the Christian praise of chastity and asceticism, the sexual norm instituted by the burgher/ capitalist class with the Protestant reintegration of sex into matrimonial life as a 'remedy to concupiscence' and the recognition of a legitimate role for women in the com-munity as wives and mothers has often been portrayed as a break with the past. But what capitalism reintegrated

into the realm of acceptable female social behavior was a tamed, domesticated form of sexuality, instrumental to the reproduction of labor power and the pacification of the workforce. In capitalism, sex can exist but only as a productive force at the service of procreation and the regeneration of the waged/male worker and as a means of social appeasement and compensation for the misery of everyday existence. Typical of the new bourgeois sexual morality was Martin Luther's injunction to the nuns to leave the convents and get married, as marriage and the production of an abundant prole was in his view women's fulfillment of God's will and their 'highest vocation.' "Let them bear children to death," he apparently declared. "They are created for that."[3] No sixteenth-century political or religious authority expressed this sentiment as crudely as Luther, but the restriction of women's sexuality to marriage and procreation, together with wifely unconditional obedience, was instituted in every country—regardless of its religious creed—as the pillar of social morality and political stability. And, indeed, of no crime were 'witches' as frequently accused as 'lewd behavior,' generally associated with infanticide and an inherent hostility to the reproduction of life.

Outside these parameters, outside of marriage, procreation, and male/institutional control, for the capitalists as well, female sexuality has historically represented a social danger, a threat to the discipline of work, a power over others, and an obstacle to the maintenance of social hierarchies and class relations. This was especially the case in the sixteenth century, when the structures that in feudal society had regulated sexual conduct and the sexual exchange between women and men entered into crisis and a new phenomenon emerged, both in the cities and rural areas, that of unattached women, living alone, often practicing prostitution.

Not surprisingly, the charge of sexual perversion was as central to the trials organized by lay authorities as to those initiated and directed by the Inquisition. Here too, beneath the fantastic charge of copulation with the Devil, we find the fear that women could bewitch men with their 'glamour,' bring them under their power, and inspire in them such desire as to cause them to forget all social distances and obligations. Such was the case, according to Guido Ruggiero's *Binding Passions* (1993), with the courtesans in sixteenth-century Venice who managed to contract marriages with noblemen but were then accused of being witches.

The fear of women's uncontrolled sexuality explains the popularity in the demonologies of the myth of Circe, the legendary enchantress who by her magical arts transformed the men lusting after her into animals. It also accounts for the many speculations by the same demonologies concerning the power of women's eyes to move men without a touch, simply by the force of their 'glamour' and 'fascination.' Also, the 'pact' that the witches were accused of making with the Devil, which generally involved a monetary exchange, manifests the concern for women's ability to gain money from men that underlies the condemnation of prostitution.

Thus, no effort was spared to paint female sexuality as something dangerous for men and to humiliate women in such a way as to curb their desire to use their bodies to attract them. Never in history have women been subjected to such a massive, internationally organized, legally approved, religiously blessed assault on their bodies. On the flimsiest evidence, generally nothing more than a denunciation, thousands were arrested, stripped naked, completely shaved, and then pricked with long needles in every part of their bodies in search of the 'Devil's mark,' often in the presence of men, from the executioner to

the local notables and priests. And this was by no means the end of their torments. The most sadistic tortures ever invented were inflicted on the body of the woman accused, which provided an ideal laboratory for the development of a science of pain and torture.

As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch*, the witch hunt instituted a regime of terror on all women, from which emerged the new model of femininity to which women had to conform to be socially accepted in the developing capitalist society: sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world, accepting as natural the confinement to a sphere of activities that in capitalism has been completely devalued.

Women were terrorized through fantastic accusations, horrendous torture, and public executions because their social power had to be destroyed—a power that in the eyes of their persecutors was obviously significant, even in the case of older women. Old women, in fact, could seduce the younger into their evils ways and would likely transmit forbidden knowledge, like that of abortion-inducing plants, and carry the collective memory of their community. As Robert Muchembled has reminded us, elderly women were the ones who remembered the promises made, the faith betrayed, the extent of property (especially in land), the customary agreements, and who was responsible for violating them.[4] Like the blue yarn in *Trazando el Camino*, old women going from house to house circulated stories and secrets, binding passions and weaving together past and present events. As such they were a disturbing, fear-inspiring presence for a reforming elite of modernizers bent on destroying the past, controlling people's behavior down to their instinctual life, and undoing customary relations and obligations.

The portrayal of women's earthly challenges to the power structures as a demonic conspiracy is a

phenomenon that has played out over and over in history down to our times. The McCarthy 'witch hunt' against communism and the 'War on Terror' have both relied on such dynamics. The exaggeration of 'crimes' to mythical proportions so as to justify horrendous punishments is an effective means to terrorize a whole society, isolate the victims, discourage resistance, and make masses of people afraid to engage in practices that until then were considered normal.

The witch was the communist and terrorist of her time, which required a 'civilizing' drive to produce the new 'subjectivity' and sexual division of labor on which the capitalist work discipline would rely. The witch hunts were the means by which women in Europe were educated about their new social tasks and a massive defeat was inflicted on Europe's 'lower classes,' who needed to learn about the power of the state to desist from any form of resistance to its rule. At the stakes not only were the bodies of the 'witches' destroyed, so was a whole world of social relations that had been the basis of women's social power and a vast body of knowledge that women had transmitted from mother to daughter over the generations—knowledge of herbs, of the means of contraception or abortion, of what magic to use to obtain the love of men.

This is what was consumed on every village square with the execution of the women accused, who would be exhibited in the most abject state: tied up with iron chains and given to the fire. When in our imagination we multiply this scene by the thousands, we begin to understand what the witch hunt meant for Europe, in terms of not only its motifs but also its effects.

Notes

Revised edition of an article originally published in *Documenta 13: The Book of Books* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

1   Julian Cornwall, *Revolt of the Peasantry, 1549* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 19. On the rise of food prices due to the arrival of the American bullion, see also Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 27; Alexandra Shepard, "Poverty, Labour and the Language of Social Description in Early Modern England," *Past Present* 201, no. 1 (November 2008): 51–95.

2   Published in 1486 by the Dominicans Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, who had operated as inquisitors in the south of Germany, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) was one of the first and most influential demonologies and was reprinted many times in the next two hundred years. As Joseph Klaits reports, between 1481 and 1486, Kramer and Sprenger had "presided over nearly fifty executions for witchcraft in the diocese of Constance"; Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 44.

3   Mary Wiesner-Hanks, "Women's Response to the Reformation," in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 151.

4   Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne (XV*e*–XVIII*e*): Essai* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978).

On the Meaning of 'Gossip'

Tracing the history of the words frequently used to define and degrade women is a necessary step if we are to understand how gender oppression functions and reproduces itself. The history of 'gossip' is emblematic in this context. Through it we can follow two centuries of attacks on women at the dawn of modern England, when a term commonly indicating a close female friend turned into one signifying idle, backbiting talk, that is, talk potentially sowing discord, the opposite of the solidarity that female friendship implies and generates. Attaching a denigrating meaning to the term indicating friendship among women served to destroy the female sociality that had prevailed in the Middle Ages, when most of the activities women performed were of a collective nature and, in the lower classes at least, women formed a tight-knit community that was the source of a strength unmatched in the modern era.

Traces of the use of the word are frequent in the literature of the period. Deriving from the Old English terms *God* and *sibb* (akin), 'gossip' originally meant 'godparent,' one who stands in a spiritual relation to the child to be baptized. In time, however, the term was used with a broader meaning. In early modern England the word 'gossip' referred to companions in childbirth not limited to the midwife. It also became a term for women friends,

with no necessary derogatory connotations.[1] In either case, it had strong emotional connotations. We recognize it when we see the word in action, denoting the ties that bound women in premodern English society.

We find a particular example of this connotation in a mystery play of the Chester Cycle, suggesting that 'gossip' was a term of strong attachment. Mystery plays were the product of guild members, who by creating and financing these representations tried to boost their social standing as part of the local power structure.[2] Thus, they were committed to upholding expected forms of behavior and satirizing those to be condemned. They were critical of strong, independent women, and especially of their relations to their husbands, to whom—the accusation went—they preferred their friends. As Thomas Wright reports in *A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England during the Middle Ages* (1862),[3] they frequently depicted them as conducting a separate life, often "assembling with their 'gossips' in public taverns to drink and amuse themselves." Thus, in one of the mystery plays of the Chester Cycle representing Noah urging people and animals to enter the ark, the wife is shown sitting in the tavern with her 'gossips' and refusing to leave when the husband calls for her, even as the waters are rising, "unless she is allowed to take her gossips with her."[4] These, as reported by Wright, are the words that she was made to utter by the (clearly disapproving) mystery's author:

> Yes, Sir, set up your sail,
> And row forth with evil hail,
> for without fail,
> I will not out of this town,
> But I have my gossips, everyone,
> One foot further I will not go.
> They will not drown, by St. John

> And I may save their lives!
> They love me full well, by Christ!
> But you let them into your boat,
> Otherwise row now where you like
> And get yourself a new wife.[5]

In the play the scene ends with a physical fight in which the wife beats the husband.

"The tavern," Wright points out, "was the resort of women of the middle and lower orders who assembled there to drink and gossip." He adds: "The meetings of gossips in taverns form the subjects of many of the popular songs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both in England and France."[6] As an example, he cites a song, possibly from the middle of the fifteenth century, that describes one of these meetings. The women here, "having met accidentally," decide to go "where the wine is best," two by two to not attract attention and be detected by their husbands.[7] Once arrived, they praise the wine and complain about their marital situations. Then they go home, by different streets, "telling their husbands that they had been to church."[8]

The literature of mysteries and morality plays belongs to a period of transition in which women still maintained a considerable degree of social power, but their social position in urban areas was increasingly under threat, as the guilds (that sponsored the production of the plays) were beginning to exclude them from their ranks and institute new boundaries between the home and public space. Not surprisingly, then, women in them were often chastised and represented as quarrelsome, aggressive, and ready to give battle to their husbands. Typical of this trend was the representation of the 'battle for the breeches,' where the woman appeared as the dominatrix—whipping her husband, straddling across his back, in a reversal of roles

clearly intended to shame men for allowing their wives to be 'on the top.'[9]

These satirical representations, expressions of a growing misogynous sentiment, were instrumental to the politics of the guilds that were striving to become exclusively male preserves. But the representation of women as strong, self-asserting figures also captured the nature of the gender relations of the time, for neither in rural nor urban areas were women dependent on men for their survival; they had their own activities and shared much of their lives and work with other women. Women cooperated with each other in every aspect of their life. They sewed, washed their clothes, and gave birth surrounded by other women, with men rigorously excluded from the chamber of the delivering one. Their legal status reflected this greater autonomy. In Italy in the fourteenth century they could still go independently to court to denounce a man if he assaulted or molested them.[10]

By the sixteenth century, however, women's social position had begun to deteriorate, satire giving way to what without exaggeration can be described as a war on women, especially of the lower classes, reflected in the increasing number of attacks on women as 'scolds' and domineering wives and of witchcraft accusations.[11] Along with this development, we begin to see a change in the meaning of *gossip*, increasingly designating a woman engaging in idle talk.

The traditional meaning lingered on. In 1602, when Samuel Rowlands wrote *Tis Merrie When Gossips Meete*, a satirical piece describing three London women spending hours in a tavern talking about men and marriages, the word was still used to signify female friendships, implying that "women could create their social networks and their own social space" and stand up to male authority.[12] But as the century progressed the word's negative connotation

became the prevalent one. As mentioned, this transformation went hand in hand with the strengthening patriarchal authority in the family and women's exclusion from the crafts and guilds,[13] which, combined with the process of enclosures, led to a "feminization of poverty."[14] With the consolidation of the family and male authority within it, representing the power of the state with regard to wives and children, and with the loss of access to former means of livelihood both women's power and female friendships were undermined.

Thus, while in the Late Middle Ages a wife could still be represented as standing up to her husband and even coming to blows with him, by the end of the sixteenth century she could be severely punished for any demonstration of independence and any criticism she made against him. Obedience—as the literature of the time constantly stressed—was a wife's first duty, enforced by the Church, the law, public opinion, and ultimately by the cruel punishments that were introduced against the 'scolds,' like the 'scold's bridle,' also called the 'branks,' a sadistic contraption made of metal and leather that would tear the woman's tongue if she attempted to talk. This was an iron framework that enclosed the woman's head. A bridle bit about two inches long and one inch wide projected into the mouth and pressed down on top of the tongue; frequently it was studded with spikes so that if the offender moved her tongue it inflicted pain and made speaking impossible.

First recorded in Scotland in 1567, this torture instrument was designed as a punishment for women of the lower classes deemed 'nags' or 'scolds' or riotous, who were often suspected of witchcraft. Wives who were seen as witches, shrews, and scolds were also forced to wear it locked onto their heads.[15] It was often called the 'gossip bridle,' testifying to the change in the meaning of the

term. With such a frame locking their heads and mouth, those accused could be led through town in a cruel public humiliation that must have terrified all women, showing what one could expect if she did not remain subservient. Significantly, in the United States, it was used to control slaves, in Virginia until the eighteenth century.

Another torture to which assertive/rebellious women were subjected was the 'cucking stool,' or 'ducking stool,'[16] also used as a punishment for prostitutes and for women taking part in anti-enclosure riots. This was a sort of chair to which a woman was tied and "seated to be ducked in a pond or river." According to D.E. Underdown, "after 1560 evidence of its adoption begins to multiply."[17]

Women were also brought to court and fined for 'scolding,' while priests in their sermons thundered against their tongues. Wives especially were expected to be quiet, "obey their husband without question" and "stand in awe of them." Above all they were instructed to make their husbands and their homes the centers of their attentions and not spend time at the window or at the door. They were even discouraged from paying too many visits to their families after marriage, and above all from spending time with their female friends. Then, in 1547, "a proclamation was issued forbidding women to meet together to babble and talk" and ordering husbands to "keep their wives in their houses."[18] Female friendships were one of the targets of the witch hunts, as in the course of the trials accused women were forced under torture to denounce each other, friends turning in friends, daughters turning in their mothers.

It was in this context that 'gossip' turned from a word of friendship and affection into a word of denigration and ridicule. Even when used with the older meaning it displayed new connotations, referring in the late sixteenth century to an informal group of women who enforced socially acceptable behavior by means of private censure

or public rituals, suggesting that (as in the case of the midwives) cooperation among women was being put at the service of upholding the social order.

Gossiping and the Formation of a Female Viewpoint

Gossip today designates informal talk, often damaging to those that are its object. It is mostly talk that draws its satisfaction from an irresponsible disparaging of others; it is circulation of information not intended for the public ear but capable of ruining people's reputations, and it is unequivocally 'women's talk.'

It is women who 'gossip,' presumably having nothing better to do and having less access to real knowledge and information and a structural inability to construct factually based, rational discourses. Thus, gossip is an integral part of the devaluation of women's personality and work, especially domestic work, reputedly the ideal terrain on which this practice flourishes.

This conception of 'gossip,' as we have seen, emerged in a particular historical context. Viewed from the perspective of other cultural traditions, this 'idle women's talk' would actually appear quite different. In many parts of the world, women have historically been seen as the weavers of memory—those who keep alive the voices of the past and the histories of the communities, who transmit them to the future generations and, in so doing, create a collective identity and profound sense of cohesion. They are also those who hand down acquired knowledges and wisdoms—concerning medical remedies, the problems of the heart, and the understanding of human behavior, starting with that of men. Labeling all this production of knowledge 'gossip' is part of the degradation of women—it is a continuation of the demonologists' construction of the stereotypical woman as prone to malignity, envious of other people's wealth and power, and ready to lend an

ear to the Devil. It is in this way that women have been silenced and to this day excluded from many places where decisions are taken, deprived of the possibility of defining their own experience, and forced to cope with men's misogynous or idealized portraits of them. But we are regaining our knowledge. As a woman recently put it in a meeting on the meaning of witchcraft, the magic is: "We know that we know."

Notes

1   Oxford English Dictionary: 'A familiar acquaintance, friend, chum,' supported by references from 1361 to 1873.

2   Nicole R. Rice and Margaret Aziza Pappano, *The Civic Cycles: Artisan Drama and Identity in Premodern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

3   Thomas Wright, *A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England during the Middle Ages* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862).

4   On the Noah's play in the Chester Cycle, see Rice and Pappano, *The Civic Cycles*, 165–84.

5   Wright, *A History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England during the Middle Ages*, 420–21.

6   Wright, *A History*, 437–38.

7   "God may send me a stripe or two," said one, "if my husband should see me here." "Nay," said Alice, another, "she that is afraid had better go home; I dread no man"; Wright, 438.

8   Wright, 439.

9   On the attack on the domineering wife, see D.E. Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, eds. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), 129.

10   Samuel K. Cohn, "Donne in piazza e donne in tribunale a Firenze nel rinascimento," in *Studi Sorici* 22, no. 3 (July–September 1981): 531–32.

11   See Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold," 116–36.

12   Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 117.

13 The literature on women's exclusion from crafts and guilds in England, as well as France, Germany, and Holland, is extensive. For England, see Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982 [1919]).

14 Marianne Hester, "Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch Hunting," in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 302.

15 See, among others, Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold," 123.

16 Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold," 123–25; see also S.D. Amussen, "Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560–1725," in Fletcher and Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, 215.

17 Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold," 123.

18 Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965 [1935]).

New Forms of Capital Accumulation and Witch-Hunting in Our Time

Globalization, Capital Accumulation, and Violence against Women: An International and Historical Perspective

From the spread of new forms of witch-hunting in various regions of the world to the escalation worldwide of the number of women daily murdered, the evidence is mounting that a new war is being waged against women. What are its motivations and the logic behind it? Building upon a growing literature on this topic, mostly produced by feminist activists/scholars from Latin America, I address this question by placing the new forms of violence in a historical context and examining the impact of capitalist development, past and present, on women's lives and gender relations. Against this background, I also examine the relation between the different forms of this violence—familial, extra-domestic, institutional—and the strategies of resistance that women worldwide are creating to put an end to it.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the feminist movement, violence against women has been a key issue in feminist organizing, inspiring the formation of the first International Tribunal on Crimes against Women, held in Brussels in March 1976, with the presence of women from forty countries, bringing testimonies about forced motherhood and sterilization, rape, battering, incarceration in mental hospitals, and the brutal treatment of women in prisons.[1]

Since then, feminist antiviolence initiatives have multiplied, as have laws passed by governments in the wake of the United Nations World Conferences on Women. But, far from diminishing, violence against women has escalated in every part of the world, to the point that feminists now describe its lethal form as 'femicide.' Not only has violence, measured in the number of women killed and abused, continued to increase; as feminist writers have shown, it has become more public and more brutal and is taking forms once seen only in times of war.[2]

What are the driving forces of this development, and what does it tell us about the transformations that are taking place in the global economy and the social position of women? Answers to these questions have varied, but evidence is mounting that the root causes of this new surge of violence are the new forms of capital accumulation, which involve land dispossession, the destruction of communitarian relations, and an intensification in the exploitation of women's bodies and labor.

In other words, *the new violence against women is rooted in structural trends that are constitutive of capitalist development and state power in all times.*

Capitalism and Violence against Women

Capitalist development began with a war on women: the witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that in Europe and the New World led to the deaths of thousands. As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), this historically unprecedented phenomenon was a central element of the process that Marx defined as primitive accumulation, for it destroyed a universe of female subjects and practices that stood in the way of the main requirements of the developing capitalist system: the accumulation of a massive workforce and the imposition of a more constraining discipline of labor. Naming and

persecuting women as 'witches' paved the way to the confinement of women in Europe to unpaid domestic labor. It legitimated their subordination to men in and beyond the family. It gave the state control over their reproductive capacity, guaranteeing the creation of new generations of workers. In this way, the witch hunts constructed a specifically capitalist, patriarchal order that has continued into the present, though it has been constantly adjusted in response to women's resistance and the changing needs of the labor market.

From the tortures and executions to which women accused of witchcraft were subjected, other women soon learned that they would have to be obedient and silent and would have to accept hard labor and men's abuses in order to be socially accepted. Until the eighteenth century, for those who fought back, there would be the 'scold's bridle,' a metal and leather contraption also used to muzzle slaves that enclosed the wearer's head and, if she attempted to speak, lacerated her tongue. Gender-specific forms of violence were also perpetrated on the American plantations where, by the eighteenth century, the masters' sexual assaults on female slaves had turned into a systematic politics of rape, as planters attempted to replace the importation of slaves from Africa with a local breeding industry centered in Virginia.[3]

Violence against women did not disappear with the end of the witch hunts and the abolition of slavery. On the contrary, it was normalized. In the twenties and thirties, at the peak of the eugenic movement, female 'sexual promiscuousness,' portrayed as feeblemindedness, was punished with institutionalization in mental hospitals or sterilization.[4] The sterilization of women of color, poor women, and women who practiced their sexuality outside of marriage continued into the 1960s, both in South and the North, becoming "the most rapidly growing form

of birth control in the United States."[5] Violence against women must also include the widespread use, in the 1950s, of lobotomy as a cure for depression, this type of surgery being considered ideal for women destined to domestic work, presumably requiring no brain.

Most important, as Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa has pointed out in *Un lavoro d'amore* (The Work of Love, 1978), violence has always been present as a subtext, a possibility, in the nuclear family, because men, through their wages, have been given the power to supervise women's unpaid domestic labor, to use women as their servants, and to punish their refusal of this work. This is why male domestic violence was not, until recently, considered a crime. In parallel with the state's legitimation of the right of parents to punish their children as part of their training as future workers, domestic violence against women has been tolerated by the courts and the police as a legitimate response to women's noncompliance in their domestic duties.

While violence against women has been normalized as a structural aspect of familial and gender relations, what has developed during the past several decades exceeds the norm. Exemplary is the case of the murders of Ciudad Juárez, a city across the Mexican border from El Paso, Texas, where in the last twenty years hundreds of women have disappeared, their tortured bodies often found abandoned in public spaces. This is not an isolated case. Kidnappings and murders of women are a daily reality today in Latin America, evoking memories of the 'dirty wars' that in the 1980s bloodied so many countries of the region. This is because the capitalist class is determined to turn the world upside down to consolidate its power, which was undermined in the 1960s and 1970s by anticolonial, feminist, and antiapartheid struggles, like the Black Power movement. And it does so by attacking

people's means of reproduction and instituting a regime of permanent warfare.

My thesis, in other words, is that we are witnessing an escalation of violence against women, especially Afro-descendant and Native American women, because 'globalization' is a process of political recolonization intended to give capital uncontested control over the world's natural wealth and human labor, and this cannot be achieved without attacking women, who are directly responsible for the reproduction of their communities. Not surprisingly, violence against women has been more intense in those parts of the world (sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia) that are richer in natural resources and are now marked up for commercial ventures, and where the anticolonial struggle has been the strongest. Brutalizing women is functional to the 'new enclosures.'[6] It paves the way for the land grabs, privatizations, and wars that for years have been devastating entire regions.

The brutality of the attacks perpetrated against women is often so extreme that they seem to have no utilitarian purpose. With reference to the tortures inflicted on women's bodies by paramilitary organizations operating in Latin America, Rita Laura Segato has spoken of an 'expressive violence' and 'pedagogical cruelty,' arguing that their objective is to terrorize, to send a message, first to women and then, through them, to entire populations that no mercy should be expected.[7] By clearing large territories of their inhabitants, by forcing people to leave their homes, their fields, their ancestral lands, violence against women is a crucial part of the operations of the mining and petroleum companies that today are displacing scores of villages in Africa and Latin America. It is the other side of the mandates of international institutions, such as the World Bank and the United Nations, that shape global economic policy and set the mining codes and are ultimately

responsible for the neocolonial conditions under which corporations operate on the ground. It is to their offices and their development plans that we must turn, in fact, to understand the logic whereby militias in the diamond, coltan, and copper fields of the Democratic Republic of the Congo shoot their pistols into women's vaginas, or Guatemalan soldiers have ripped open pregnant women's bellies with knives in what continues to be portrayed as a counterinsurgency war. Segato is right. Such violence cannot emerge from the everyday lives of any community. It is 'handbook violence.' It must be planned, calculated, and performed with the utmost guarantee of impunity, in the same way as mining companies today pollute lands, rivers, and streams with deadly chemicals with total impunity, while the people who live off these resources are imprisoned by security guards if they dare to resist. No matter who the immediate perpetrators may be, only powerful states and agencies can give a green light to such devastation and ensure that the culprits are never brought to justice.

It is essential to emphasize that violence against women is a key element in this new global war, not only because of the horror it evokes or the messages it sends but because of what women represent in their capacity to keep their communities together and, equally important, to defend noncommercial conceptions of security and wealth. In Africa and India, for instance, until recently women had access to communal land and devoted a good part of their workday to subsistence farming. But both communal land tenure and subsistence agriculture have come under heavy institutional attack, criticized by the World Bank as one of the causes of global poverty under the assumption that land is a 'dead asset' unless it is legally registered and used as collateral to obtain bank loans with which to start some entrepreneurial activity.

In reality, it is thanks to subsistence farming that many people have been able to survive brutal austerity programs. But critiques like the World Bank's, repeated as they have been in scores of meetings with government authorities and local leaders, have been successful in both Africa and India, so that women have been forced to give up subsistence production and work as their husbands' helpers in commodity production. As Maria Mies has observed, this coerced dependence is one of the specific ways in which women in rural areas are being "integrated into development" that is itself a violent process. Not only is it "guaranteed by the violence inherent in the patriarchal men-women relations," it also devalues women, so that the men of their communities view them (especially when they are old) as useless beings whose assets and labor can be appropriated without qualms.

Changes in laws and norms of land ownership and in the concept of what may be considered a source of value appears to also be at the root of a phenomenon that has produced much misery for women since the 1990s, especially in Africa and India: the return of witch-hunting. Many factors contribute to the resurgence of witch hunts, among them the disintegration of communal solidarity, due to decades of impoverishment and the ravages of AIDS and other diseases in societies where malnutrition is rampant and health care systems have collapsed. Further factors are the spread of neo-Calvinist evangelical sects preaching that poverty is caused by personal shortcomings or witches' evil doings. But it has been noted that witchcraft accusations are more frequent in areas designated for commercial projects or where land privatization processes are underway (as in India's tribal communities) and when the accused have some land that can be confiscated. In Africa, in particular, the victims are older women living alone off some piece of land, while the accusers

are younger members of their communities, or even of their own families, generally unemployed youth, who see these elderly women as usurping what should belong to them, and who may be manipulated by other actors who remain in the shadows, including local leaders, who often conspire with business interests.[8]

There are other ways in which the new forms of capital accumulation instigate violence against women. Unemployment, precarious work, and the collapse of the family wage are key. Deprived of income, men vent their frustrations on the women in their families or try to recuperate the lost money and social power by exploiting women's bodies and work. This is the case with the 'dowry murders' in India, where middle-class men kill their wives if they do not bring sufficient assets with them or in order to marry another woman and acquire another dowry. A further example is sex trafficking, a key element in the expansion of the sex industry that is predominantly run by male criminal organizations capable of imposing slave labor 'in its crudest form.'[9]

Here individual micropolitics mimic and merge with institutional macropolitics. For capital, as well as for men cast into conditions of precarity, women's worth resides increasingly in the cheap paid labor they can provide through the sale of their work and bodies on the market, rather than in their unpaid domestic work, which would need to be supported by a stable male wage, something contemporary capitalism is determined to phase out, except for limited sectors of the population. Women's work in the home and as producers of the new generations has not disappeared, but it is no longer a sufficient condition for social acceptance. On the contrary, pregnancy is often a liability, significantly increasing women's vulnerability to violence, as men resent the responsibility it entails. The newly emergent political economy thus fosters more violent familial

relations, as women are expected not to depend on men and to bring money home, but then are abused if they fall short on their domestic duties or demand more power in recognition of their monetary contributions.

Women's need to leave the home, to emigrate, to take their reproductive work to the streets (as vendors, traders, sex workers), in order to support their families, also gives rise to new forms of violence against them. Indeed, all evidence indicates that women's integration in the global economy is a violent process. Migrant women from Latin America are known to take contraceptives, expecting to be raped by the now-militarized border police. Street vendors clash with the police trying to confiscate their goods. As Jules Falquet has noted, as women shift from serving one man to serving many men (cooking, cleaning, providing sexual services), traditional forms of restraint break down, making women more vulnerable to abuse. Individual male violence is also a response to women's more assertive demands for autonomy and economic independence and, more simply, a backlash against the rise of feminism.[10] This is the kind of violence that exploded in the École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal on December 6, 1989, when a man entered a classroom, separated men from women, and opened fired on the women, screaming, "You are all fucking feminists," killing fourteen. Misogyny is also compounded by racism. In the United States, where since the 1980s the murders of women have been steadily rising, with more than three thousand women killed each year, the murders of women of color are less likely to receive media attention or to be solved than the murders of white women—see the glacial pace of the investigations into the serial killings of low-income African American women in Los Angeles and other cities. Transphobia too compounds misogyny. Between 2010 and 2016, at least 111 transgender and gender-nonconforming people were murdered in the

U.S, most of whom were black trans women. According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, twenty-three of these homicides occurred in 2016, the highest figure ever recorded by the NCAVP. In Canada, too, racialized violence has been on the rise. Dozens of women, mostly Native American, have vanished and have later been found dead along what is now called the Highway of Tears.[11]

These forms of violence are obviously different from those inflicted on women by paramilitary, narcos, and the companies' private armies or security guards. Yet, they are deeply related. As Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredeth Turshen have noted,[12] what connects wartime and peacetime violence is the denial of women's autonomy, which is in turn linked to sexual control and allocation of resources. Maria Mies has also noted, "In all these production relations, based on violence and coercion, we can observe an interplay between men (fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps, sons), the patriarchal family, the state and capitalist enterprises."[13] Domestic and public violence (i.e., military or paramilitary violence, witch hunts) also feed each other. Often women do not denounce the abuses they have suffered for fear of being rejected by their families or being subjected to further violence. On the other hand, institutional tolerance of domestic violence creates a culture of impunity that contributes to normalizing the public violence inflicted on women.

In all the cases mentioned above, violence against women is physical violence. But we should not ignore the violence perpetrated by economic and social policy and the marketization of reproduction. Poverty resulting from cuts in welfare, employment, and social services should itself be considered a form of violence, and so should inhumane working conditions, as found for example in the *maquilas*, the new slave plantations. Lack of health care, the denial

of access to abortion, the abortion of female fetuses, the sterilization of women in Africa, India, and Latin America in the name of 'population control,' and not least 'microcredit'—so often leading to catastrophe for those who cannot pay back the loans—these too are egregious forms of violence. To this we must also add the growing militarization of everyday life, with its attendant glorification of aggressive, misogynous models of masculinity. As Jules Falquet has argued, the proliferation of armed men and the development of a new sexual division of labor, whereby most jobs open to men (as private domestic guards, commercial security guards, prison guards, members of gangs and mafias, and soldiers in regular or private armies) require violence, plays a central role in forging increasingly toxic masculinities.[14] Statistics show that those who kill are often men who are familiar with and have access to arms and who are accustomed to resolving conflicts with violence. In the U.S. they are often policemen or veterans of the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. The high level of violence against women in the U.S. military has been a significant factor in this context. As Frantz Fanon pointed out, with reference to the Frenchmen whose task was to torture the Algerian rebels, violence is indivisible: you cannot practice it as your daily occupation without developing violent character traits and taking it home. The media construction and dissemination of hypersexualized models of femininity has exacerbated this problem, openly inviting sexual assault and contributing to a misogynous culture in which women's aspirations to autonomy are degraded and reduced to the status of sexual provocation.

Given the pervasive character of the violence women are confronting, it is clear that resistance to it must also be organized on many fronts. Mobilizations are already underway, increasingly shunning dead-end solutions, such as demanding more punitive legislation, which only serves

to give more power to the very authorities that are directly or indirectly responsible for the problem. More effective are the strategies that women devise when they take things in their hands. Particularly successful tactics are opening shelters controlled not by the authorities but by the women who use them, organizing self-defense classes, and building broadly inclusive demonstrations like the Take Back the Night marches that originated in the 1970s or the marches organized by women in India against rape and dowry murders, which often led to sit-ins in the neighborhoods of the perpetrators or in front of police stations. In recent years we have also seen the rise of anti–witch hunt campaigns in both Africa and India, with women and men going from village to village, educating people about the causes of illness and the interests motivating male traditional healers, local leaders, and other frequent accusers. In some areas of Guatemala, women have begun taking the names of abusive soldiers and then exposing them in their villages of origin. In each case, women's decision to fight back, break their isolation, and join with other women have been vital for the success of these efforts. But these strategies cannot produce lasting change if they are not accompanied by a process of revaluation of the position of women and of the reproductive activities they contribute to their families and communities, and such cannot be affected unless women acquire the resources they need to be independent of men, so that they cannot be forced, for the sake of survival, to accept dangerous and exploitative conditions of work and familial relations.

Notes

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1   See Diana E.H. Russell and Nicole Van de Ven, ed., *Crimes against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Russell Publications, 1990 [1976]), accessed May 3, 2018, http://womenation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Crimes_Against_Women_Tribunal.pdf.

2   Most important in this context is the work of the Argentinian scholar and activist Rita Laura Segato. See *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: territorio, soberanía y crímenes de segundo estado* (Mexico City: Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana, 2006); *Las nuevas formas de la guerra y el cuerpo de las mujeres* (Puebla: Pez en el Árbol, 2014).

3   Ned Sublette and Constance Sublette, *The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave-Breeding Industry* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2016).

4   In a set of articles published in the 1930s in *New Masses*, Meridel Le Sueur described how during the Great Depression unemployed working-class women on relief lived in fear of being kidnapped by social workers and institutionalized or forcibly sterilized; Meridel Le Sueur, *Women on the Breadlines*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: West End Press, 1984 [1977]).

5   Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016 [1997]), 90–91.

6   The concept of the 'new enclosures' was articulated in an issue of the *Midnight Notes* series dedicated to this topic, designating the consequences of programs like structural adjustment and the destruction of communal land regimes in Africa and other former colonial regions generally. See Midnight Notes Collective, *The New Enclosures, Midnight Notes* no. 10 (1990), accessed June 13, 2018, https://libcom.org/files/mn10-new-enclosures.pdf.

7   Rita Laura Segato, *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez*, 22–23.

8   On witch-hunting in Africa, see "Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today," chap. 7 in this volume.

9   Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Books, 2014 [1986]), 146.

10 Jane Caputi and Diana E.H. Russell, "Femicide: Sexist Terrorism Against Women," in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*, eds. Jill Radford and Diana E.H. Russell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 13–21.

11   Dan Levin, "Dozens of Women Vanish on Canada's Highway of Tears, and Most Cases Are Unsolved," *New York Times*, May 24, 2016, accessed May 9, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/25/world/americas/canada-indigenous-women-highway-16.html.

12   Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredeth Turshen, ed., *The Aftermath: Women in Post-conflict Transformations* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

13   Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, 146.

14   Jules Falquet, "Hommes en armes et femmes 'de service': tendances néolibérales dans l'évolution de la division sexuelle internationale du travail," *Cahiers de Genre* no. 40 (2006): 15–37.

Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today

> **Witch-hunting did not disappear from the repertoire of the bourgeoisie with the abolition of slavery. On the contrary, the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that this persecution would be planted in the body of colonized societies, and, in time, would be carried out by the subjugated communities in their own name and against their own members.**
> —*Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*

Discussing witch-hunting as a global phenomenon at the end of *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) and commenting on the witch hunts that have taken place in Africa and other parts of the world in the 1980s and 1990s, I expressed my concern that these persecutions were rarely reported in Europe and the United States. Today, the literature on the return of witch-hunting on the world scene has grown and so have media reports of witch killings, coming not only from Africa but also from India, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea. Yet, with few exceptions,[1] social justice movements and even feminist organizations continue to be silent on this matter, although the victims are predominantly women.

By witch-hunting I refer to the recurrence of punitive expeditions by young male vigilantes or self-appointed

witch finders, often leading to the murder of the accused and the confiscation of their properties. Especially in Africa, this has become a serious problem over the last two decades, continuing to this day. In Kenya alone, more than a one hundred people have been murdered, since 1992, mostly in the southwestern province of Kisii.[2] Since then reports of 'witch killings' have multiplied, numbering in the thousands and ongoing until today. As the Ghanaian sociologist Mensah Adinkrah reports, "In recent years, the infliction of violence against suspected or accused witches has emerged as a major form of human rights abuse in Africa. Many local and international media agencies have reported scores of people being threatened, intimidated, tortured or murdered on suspicion of witchcraft."[3]

Studied mostly by anthropologists, witchcraft accusations and killings should concern all feminists, North and South. For in addition to inflicting an unspeakable suffering on those accused and perpetrating a misogynous ideology that degrades all women, they have devastating consequences for the communities affected, especially the younger generations. They are also emblematic of the effects of economic globalization, further demonstrating that it contributes to the escalation of male violence against women.

In what follows, I discuss the witch hunts in Africa, examining their motivations and suggesting some initiatives that feminists can take to put an end to these persecutions. My argument is that these witch hunts must be understood in the context of the deep crisis in the process of social reproduction that the liberalization and globalization of African economies has produced, undermining local economies, devaluing women's social position, and generating intense conflicts between young and old and women and men over the use of crucial economic resources, starting with land. In this sense, I see

the present witch hunts on a continuum with such phenomena as the 'dowry murders,' the return of *sati* in India, and the killings of hundreds of women in some Mexican towns at the border with the United States, like Ciudad Juárez. In different ways, witchcraft accusations too are an effect of the process of social alienation produced by 'integration' into the global economy and men's readiness to vent on women their economic frustrations, and even take their lives, to keep abreast of advancing capitalist relations. These new witch hunts are also on a continuum with the worldwide return of 'the supernatural' in political discourse and popular practice (e.g., 'satanic cults' in Europe and the U.S.), a phenomenon that can be attributed to the proliferation of fundamentalist religious sects, but which, significantly, has emerged in conjunction with the liberalization of Africa's economic and political life.

My analysis leads me to conclude that while mobilizing against these egregious violations of women's rights, feminists should put on trial the agencies that have created the material and social conditions that have made them possible. These include the African governments that do not intervene to prevent the killings or punish them and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and their international supporters—the U.S., Canada, and the European Union—whose economic policies have destroyed local economies and recolonized the African continent, as in the name of the 'debt crisis' and 'economic recovery' they have imposed on Africa countries brutal austerity regimes and stripped governments of much of their decisional power. Most crucially, feminists should put on trial the United Nations, which pays lip service to women's rights but treats economic liberalization as a millennium goal and watches in silence while old women in Africa and many other parts of the world are demonized, expelled from their communities, cut to pieces, or burned alive.

Witch-Hunting and Globalization in Africa from the 1980s to the Present

Although the fear of witchcraft is often described as a deep-seated feature of Africa's belief systems,[4] assaults on 'witches' intensified across Africa in the 1990s in ways unprecedented in the precolonial period. Figures are difficult to come by, since attacks and killings have often gone unpunished and unrecorded, but what is available shows the magnitude of the problem.

Approximately three thousand women are now exiled in 'witch camps' in the north of Ghana, forced to flee their communities under the threat of death.[5] As we have seen, scores of people, mostly women, have been killed in the Gusii (Kisii) district of southwestern Kenya, the attackers being well-organized groups of young men, usually unmarried, acting as mercenaries under the directives of relatives of the victims or other interested parties.[6] Intense persecutions have occurred in South Africa's Northern Province since the end of apartheid, with such a heavy toll in human lives that the African National Congress saw fit to appoint a commission of inquiry on the matter as one of its first acts in government.[7] Routine assaults on 'witches,' often with deadly consequences, have also been recorded in the Republic of Benin, Cameroon, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda. According to one account, between 1991 and 2001, at least twenty-three thousand 'witches' were killed in Africa, the figure being considered a conservative one.[8] 'Cleansing' campaigns have also been launched, with witch finders going from village to village, submitting everyone to humiliating and frightening interrogations and exorcisms. This has been the case in Zambia, where, in one of the districts of Central Province 176 witch finders were active in the summer of 1997, and, since then, witch hunts "have proceeded unabated," with the accused driven out of their

villages, having their possessions expropriated, and often being tortured and killed.[9]

In most instances, witch hunters have operated with impunity, even in daylight. Police forces often either side with them or refuse to arrest them to avoid be accused of protecting witches or because they cannot find people willing to testify against them. Governments too have watched from the sidelines. Except for the government of South Africa, none has seriously investigated the circumstance of these killings. More surprising, feminists have not spoken out against them. They fear, perhaps, that denouncing these witch hunts may promote colonial stereotypes of Africans as a population mired in backwardness and irrationality. Such fears are not unfounded, but they are misguided. Witch hunts are not just an African problem but a global one. They are part of a worldwide pattern of increasing violence against women that we need to combat. Thus, we need to understand the forces and social dynamics responsible for witch hunts.

It is important to stress in this context that anti-witchcraft movements only began in Africa in the colonial period, in conjunction with the introduction of cash economies that profoundly changed social relations, creating new forms of inequality.[10] Prior to colonization, 'witches' were at times punished but rarely killed; in fact, it is even questionable whether we can speak of 'witchcraft' when referring to precolonial times, since the term was not used until the coming of the Europeans.

It was in the 1980s and 1990s that—together with the debt crisis, structural adjustment, and currency devaluation—the fear of so-called witches became a dominant concern in many African communities, so much so that "even ethnic groups . . . who had no knowledge of witchcraft before colonial time today believe to have witches in their midst."[11]

Why this resurgence of a persecution in some ways reminiscent of the European seventeenth-century witch hunts? This is a difficult question to answer, if we wish to go beyond the immediate causes. The situation is complicated by the fact that there are evidently different types of motives behind a charge of witchcraft. A witchcraft accusation can be the result of a land conflict or economic rivalries and competitions, can mask the refusal to support family or community members that are seen as a drain on resources, or it can be a device to justify the enclosures of communal lands.

What is certain is that we will not find an explanation for this phenomenon by appealing to the 'African worldview.' Similarly, the view that witchcraft accusations are leveling mechanisms used to defend communal values against the excessive accumulation of wealth can hardly account for these persecutions, given their destructive consequences for African communities and the fact that many accused are poor women. More convincing is the view that these witch hunts are not a legacy of the past but are a response to the social crisis that the neoliberal restructuring of Africa's political economies has produced. A detailed analysis of the ways in which economic globalization has created an environment conducive to witchcraft accusations is provided by Justus Ogembo's *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii, Southwestern Kenya*. Describing a situation that is duplicated in countries across the continent, Ogembo argues that structural adjustment programs and trade liberalization have so destabilized African communities, so undermined their reproductive system and thrown households into such "deprivation and despair," that many people have come to believe that they are the victims of evil conspiracies carried out by supernatural means.[12] He points out that after Kenya 'structurally adjusted' its economy, unemployment reached

unprecedented levels and the currency was devalued, so that basic commodities became unavailable and state subsidies for basic services like education, health, and public transport were gutted.

In short, millions of people in both rural and urban areas found themselves with their backs against the wall, unable to provide for their families and communities, and with no hopes for the future. Rising mortality rates, especially among children, due to the collapse of health care systems, growing malnutrition, and the spread of AIDS, contributed to fuel suspicions of foul play. Ogembo argues that the persecution of witches was further instigated by the proliferation of fundamentalist Christian sects, reinjecting into religion the fear of the Devil, and by the appearance of self-defined 'traditional healers' exploiting people's inability to pay hospital fees and hiding their incompetence behind appeals to the supernatural.

Ogembo's analysis is shared by many scholars. But other aspects of economic globalization are noted that provide a context for understanding the new surge of witch-hunting. One view is that belief in witches is being manipulated to justify expropriating people's land. In some areas of postwar Mozambique, for instance, women, who after their husbands died insisted on holding on to the couple's land, have been accused of being witches by the relatives of the deceased.[13] Others were accused when they refused to give up the land that they had rented during the war.[14] Land disputes are also at the origin of many accusations in Kenya. In both countries, land scarcity adds to the intensity of the conflicts.

Witchcraft accusations are also a means of enclosure. As international agencies, together with African governments, press for the privatization and alienation of communal lands, witchcraft accusations become a powerful means to break the resistance of those who are to be

expropriated. As historian Hugo Hinfelaar points out, with reference to Zambia:

> In the current era of uncontrolled 'market forces' as preached by the present government and other supporters of neo-liberalism, confiscating land and other forms of property has taken on a more sinister dimension. It has been noted that witchcraft accusations and cleansing rituals are particularly rife in areas earmarked for game management and game ranching, for tourism, and for occupation by potential big landowners. . . . Some chiefs and headmen profit from selling considerable portions of their domain to international investors, and fomenting social disruption in the village facilitates the transaction. A divided village will not have the power to unite and oppose attempts to having the land they cultivate being taken over by someone else. As a matter of fact, the villagers are at times so engaged in accusing each other of practicing witchcraft that they hardly notice that they are being dispossessed and they have turned into squatters on their own ancestral lands.[15]

Another source of witchcraft accusations is the increasingly mysterious character of economic transactions and people's consequent inability to understand the forces that govern their lives.[16] As local economies are transformed by international policies and the 'invisible hand' of the global market, it becomes difficult for people to understand what motivates economic change and why some prosper while others are pauperized. The result is a climate of mutual resentment and suspicion, in which those who benefit from economic liberalization fear being bewitched by those impoverished, and the poor, many of them women, see the wealth from which they

are excluded as a product of evil arts. "This conflict . . . between two moral economies," Jane Parish writes, "is a defining feature of witchcraft beliefs in Ghana today. At stake is the privileging of sociality, the local reproductive relations subverted and distorted by the alienating effects of global commodification." Ghanaian city-dwelling entrepreneurs often characterize the witch as a greedy woman who secretly envies the entrepreneurs' wealth and social status and who "unreasonably demands that more and more financial investment be poured back into the local business community rather than 'siphoned off' from it." In this sense, Parish suggests, "the fear of witchcraft may be seen as a critique of cash earned beyond the local economy and of the failure to redistribute it adequately.[17]

Witch-hunting is also attributed to the anxiety caused by the proliferation of 'occult economies' resulting from the global deregulation of economic activity and the quest for new forms of business. The traffic in organs and body parts to be used in transplants or rituals associated with the acquisition of wealth has spread in Africa, as in other parts of the world, generating a fear that evil forces are sapping people's life energies and humanity. In this sense, witchcraft accusations—like the vampire stories in colonial Africa that Louise White has studied[18]— can be seen as a response to the commodification of life and capitalism's attempt not only to reactivate slave labor but to turn human bodies themselves into means of accumulation.[19]

While multiple factors have combined to produce a climate in which the fear of witches thrives, there is consensus that at the root of the witch hunts is a fierce struggle for survival that takes the form of an intergenerational struggle. It is young men, often unemployed, who provide the manpower for the witch hunts, although they are often executing plans hatched by other actors who

remain in the shadows. They are the ones who go from house to house to collect the money needed to pay a witch finder or ambush and execute the accused.

With no possibility of going to school, no prospect of making a living off the land or finding other forms of income, unable to fulfill their roles as family providers, many young men in today's structurally adjusted Africa despair about their future and can be led to making war against their communities.[20] Hired and trained as mercenaries by politicians, rebel armies, private companies, or the state, they are ready to organize punitive expeditions, especially against old people whom they blame for their misfortunes and see as a burden and obstacle to their well-being. It is in this context that (in the words of an old Congolese man) "the youth represent a [constant threat] for us oldsters."[21]

Thus, older folks returning to their villages with the savings of a lifetime have found themselves charged as witches and have had their houses and earnings expropriated, or, worse, have been killed—hanged, buried, or burned alive.[22] In 1996 alone, the Congolese Human Rights Monitoring Commission recorded about a hundred cases in which elderly people accused of witchcraft were hanged.[23] Pensioners have also been a common target in Zambia, where "village leaders are believed to be conspiring with witch finders to strip [them] of the assets they have acquired over the years," prompting a newspaper article to comment, "Retiring, going back home has become a risky business!"[24] In rural Limpopo, South Africa, young men have burned old women alive, accusing them of turning dead people into zombies in order to get slaves and ghost workers and deprive the youth of work.[25] Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, more recently, in Eastern Nigeria, children too have been accused of being demonic. Those who charge

them are Christian exorcists or 'traditional witch doctors,' who make a living by inflicting on them all kinds of tortures under on the pretext of cleansing their bodies from the evil spirits that possess them. Thousands of children have also been tortured in this way in Angola, with the complicity of their parents, probably eager to free themselves from youngsters they can no longer support. Many children have been thrown into the streets—more than fourteen thousand just in Kinshasa—or have been killed.[26]

It is important here to stress again the role of the evangelizing religious sects (Pentecostal, Zionist) that over the last twenty years have proselytized in urban and rural Africa. Of Pentecostalism, Ogembo writes, "With its emphasis on exorcism, [it] has preyed on the Gusii indigenous beliefs about mystical forces and powers, forcing the two major denominations in Gusiland to reexamine their doctrines on the same."[27] He adds that through books and open-air sermons in market centers and other public spaces, evangelists have increased people's anxiety about the Devil, preaching a connection between Satan, illness, and death. The media has helped in this process, a sign that the new 'witch craze' is not a purely spontaneous development. Streams of radio and television programs are daily broadcast in Ghana describing how witches operate and how they can be identified. Witchcraft is also a theme in Ghanaian music and movies and in the sermons of the clergy, often recorded in videos destined to mass consumption.

Witch-Hunting as Women-Hunting

As we have seen, the recent witch hunts have targeted both young and old. As in the European witch hunts of the past, however, those most frequently and violently attacked have been older women. In Ghana, they have been so much at risk that 'witch camps' have been created,

where those accused live in exile, after being expelled from their villages, sometimes even moving there 'voluntarily' when they are past the childbearing age or are alone and feel vulnerable to attacks.[28] As Mensah Adinkrah reports, older women were also the majority of the victims in the witch hunts that took place in Ghana in 1997, when many elderly women were violently attacked and accused of causing an epidemic of meningitis that affected the country's Northern Region, and in the Gusii witch hunts of 1992–1995. The few men murdered there were guilty of association with suspected witches or were killed in their stead, when the women targeted could not be found or when the men tried to protect them.[29] Women are the main victims in the Congo, South Africa, Zambia, and Tanzania. Most are farmers, often living alone. But in urban areas it is traders who are more commonly attacked, as men respond to the loss of economic security and masculine identity by discrediting women whom they see or believe to be competing with them. In Northern Ghana, female traders have been accused of gaining their wealth by turning souls into commodities.[30] In Zambia, those at risk are independent women, "who frequently travel as entrepreneurs and smugglers along the national highways."[31] There are witch finders who accuse women because they have red eyes, which they claim is a sign of women's devilish nature, though "many Tanzanian women possess red eye color due to the smoke of their cooking fires."[32]

What is taking place, then, is a broad attack on women, reflecting a dramatic devaluation of their position and identity. 'Traditional' patriarchal prejudices certainly play a role in it. Shaped by male-centered religious values, indigenous as well as those grafted on to them by colonization, African cultures picture women as more jealous, vindictive, and secretive than men and more predisposed to evil forms of witchcraft.[33] The role of women

in the reproduction of their families magnifies men's fear of their powers. Interviewed by Allison Berg, the male keeper of one of Ghana's witch camps was explicit on this point. Witches, he said, are women because "it is women who cook for men!"[34] Nevertheless, patriarchal views of femininity do not explain the explosion of misogyny that these witch hunts represent. This becomes evident when we consider the cruelty of the punishments, all the more shocking as they are inflicted on old women in communities where old age has always commanded great respect. With reference to the witch hunts in Gusii, Ogembo writes:

> [The] villagers rounded up and 'arrested' suspects in their houses at night or chased them and caught them like prey by day, bound their hands and feet with sisal ropes, torched them—after dousing them with gasoline purchased earlier or placing them under grass-thatched roofs—and then drew back to watch the victims agonize and perish in the flames. Some of those murdered in this way left behind a terrified and now orphaned offspring.[35]

It is reckoned that thousands of women have been burned or buried alive or have been beaten and tortured to death. In Ghana, children have been encouraged to stone the old women accused. Indeed, we could not explain such brutality if we did not have both historical precedents and more recent examples coming from other parts of our 'global village,' like India or Papua New Guinea.

The historical comparison that comes to mind is the witch hunts that took place in Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, which sent hundreds of thousands of women to the stake. This is a precedent that the scholars of the African witch hunts do not like to acknowledge, because of the immensely different historical and cultural contexts. Furthermore, unlike the European witch hunts,

those that are taking place in Africa or India today are not the work of magistrates, kings, and popes. Nevertheless, they share important elements with the European witch hunts that cannot be denied and help us 'historicize' the present persecution,[36] throwing light on witch-hunting as a disciplinary tool.

There are echoes of the European witch hunts in the crimes that today's African 'witches' are accused of, which often seem to be borrowed from the European demonologies, plausibly reflecting the influence of evangelization: night flights, shape shifting, cannibalism, causing sterility in women and infant deaths, and the destruction of crops. In both cases, moreover, the 'witches' are predominantly older women and poor farmers, often living alone, or women believed to be competing with men. Most important, like the European witch hunts, the new witch hunts in Africa are taking place in societies that are undergoing a process of 'primitive accumulation,' where many farmers are forced off the land, new property relations and new concepts of value creation are coming into place, and communal solidarity is breaking down under the impact of economic strain.

As I have argued in *Caliban and the Witch*, it is not a coincidence that under these circumstances, women, older ones in particular, should suffer a process of social degradation and become the target of a gender war. In part, as we have seen, this development can be traced to young people's reluctance, in a time of diminishing resources, to support their kinfolks and to their eagerness to appropriate their belongings. But most crucially, when monetary relations become hegemonic, women's contribution to the community is totally 'devalued.' This is especially true of older women who can no longer provide children or sexual services and, therefore, appear to be a drain on the creation of wealth.

There is a significant parallel here between the attack on old African female rural farmers perpetrated through witchcraft accusations and the ideological campaign that the World Bank has been mounting across the continent to promote the commercialization of land, which claims that land is a 'dead asset' as long as it is used as a means of livelihood and shelter, becoming productive only when brought as collateral for credit to the bank.[37] I argue that many older women and men in Africa today are hunted as witches because they too are seen as dead assets, the embodiment of a world of practices and values that is increasingly considered sterile and nonproductive.

In making this point, I do not intend to minimize the importance of the complex of grievances, old and new, that in each instance combine to produce witchcraft accusations. Old rumors compounded by mysterious deaths, especially of children, the desire to appropriate coveted properties (sometimes just a radio or TV), anger against adulterous behavior, and above all land disputes or simply the decision to force people off the land are the daily substance of the African persecutions, as they were in the witch hunts in Europe. The structure of the polygamous family also contributes to foment witchcraft accusations, creating jealousies and competitions among co-wives and siblings with regard to the distribution of the family's assets, especially the land. Thus, stepmothers and co-wives figure prominently among the women accused. Growing land scarcity intensifies these conflicts, for husbands now find it difficult to provide for all their wives, causing intense rivalries among them and their children. In postwar Mozambique, as we have seen, the struggle over land has even brought women to accuse each other of witchcraft.[38] Yet we cannot understand how these conflicts can instigate such cruel attacks on old women unless we place them on a broader canvass. This is the

world of the disintegrating communal village economy, in which older women are those who most strenuously defend a noncapitalist use of natural resources—practicing subsistence farming and refusing, for example, to sell their land or their trees, in order to keep them for their children's security[39]—and where a generation of youngsters is growing up whose minds have become unsettled because of the hardships they are facing, and who are now convinced that older people can no longer provide for their future and, worse yet, are blocking their access to wealth. As Mark Auslander has written, drawing from his experience in Ngoni land (Eastern Zambia), old men too are caught in this conflict between the values of the older subsistence-oriented communal world and those of the advancing monetary economy.

In popular songs and plays they lament that their children will poison them to sell their cattle for cash and to buy chemical fertilizer or a truck. But the "battle to make wealth" is "waged [above all] upon the mature female body,"[40] because old women are believed to pose a special threat to the reproduction of their communities, by destroying crops, making young women barren, and hoarding what they have. In other words, the battle is waged on women's bodies, because women are seen as the main agents of resistance to the expansion of the cash economy and, as such, as useless individuals, selfishly monopolizing resources that the youth could use. From this viewpoint, the present witch hunts, no less than the ideology that the World Bank promotes with regard to land, represent a complete perversion of the traditional conception of value creation, which is symbolized by the contempt that witch hunters display for the bodies of older women, whom, in Zambia, they have at times derided as 'sterile vaginas.'

As we have seen, the elimination of aging female subsistence farmers is not the only motivation behind

the attack perpetrated against African 'witches.' As in six-teenth-century Europe, many men today are responding to the threat that the expansion of capitalist relations poses to their economic security and masculine identity by dis-crediting the women whom they believe to be competing with them. Thus, market women, a major social force in Africa, have often been accused of being witches thanks to national politicians who have blamed them for the high rate of inflation that the liberalization of the economy has caused.[41]

But the attack on trading women also involves a clash between opposing value systems. As reported by Jane Parish, in Ghana, witchcraft accusations develop in the clash between the values of the predominantly female village traders, who insist on returning the money they earn to the local economy where they can keep track of it, and those of the male businessmen who are involved in the export/import trade, and who look at the world market as their economic horizon.[42] Sexual elements also enter this scenario, as the same businessmen fear that 'witches' can appropriate their bodies (as well as their wallets) through their sexual arts. But the charge most often moved against 'witches' is that they are sterile and produce sterility, both sexual and economic, in the people they bewitch.[43] "Open the wombs!" women accused of making other women barren were commanded in a rural community of Eastern Zambia during a witch-finding campaign in 1989.[44] Meanwhile, their bodies were cut open with dozens of razor incisions, into which a 'cleans-ing' medicine was poured.[45]

Witch-Hunting and Feminist Activism: Reconstructing the Commons

Considering the danger that the African witch hunts rep-resent for women, the suffering they inflict, their violation

of women's bodies and rights, we can only speculate as to why feminists have not spoken up and mobilized against them. Possibly, some may think that focusing on this issue may divert attention from broader political concerns like war, global debt, and environmental crises. As I mentioned, there may be also a reluctance to tackle this topic for fear of promoting a colonial image of Africans as a backward population. But the result is that it is mostly journalists and academics who have analyzed this persecution, and, as a consequence, it has been depoliticized. Most accounts are written in a detached mode, showing little outrage for the horrific destiny that so many of the accused have met. With few exceptions, none of the reports I have read were written in an advocacy mode or protest the indifference of national and international institutions to this butchery. Most anthropological analyses are concerned with demonstrating that the new witch hunts are not a return to tradition but Africans' way of negotiating the challenges of 'modernity.' Few have words of sympathy for the women, men, and children who have been murdered. One anthropologist even collaborated with a witch finder. Over a period of months, he followed one who was traveling from village to village in Zambia to exorcise those whom he identified as witches. He tape-recorded the entire exercise, which was often so violent that he compared it to an incursion by armed bandits, with people being insulted, terrified, and cut up, presumably to force the evil spirits out of their bodies. Then, to the witch finder's satisfaction, the anthropologist turned over the photos he took, knowing that the witch finder would use them to publicize his work.

Feminists' first contribution, then, should be to engage in a different type of investigation, one analyzing the social conditions that produce witch hunts. This would help build a constituency of human rights activists

and social justice groups committed to documenting, publicizing, and ending the persecutions. Examples of this type of scholarship and activism are not lacking. For years, feminists in India have mobilized public opinion against dowry murders, turning it into a global issue, while retaining control over its definition. The same development must take place in the case of Africa's witch hunts. They too have to be brought to the foreground of political activism, both because they constitute outstanding human rights violations and because crucial issues are at stake in these persecutions that go to the core of Africa's political economy and social life on much of the planet.

At stake are women's lives, the values transmitted to the new generations, and the possibility of cooperation between women and men. Also at stake is the destiny of the communal systems that shaped life in Africa and in many parts of the world until the advent of colonialism. More than anywhere else, in Africa communalism has defined social life and culture for generations, surviving into the 1980s and beyond, because in many countries the land was never alienated, even in the colonial period, though much was diverted to the production of cash crops. Indeed, Africa has long been viewed as a scandal by capitalist policy planners, who have welcomed the World Bank's structural adjustment programs as an opportunity for the development of African land markets. But as the present witch hunts indicate, African communalism is undergoing a historic crisis and this is where the political challenge for social justice movements lies.

It is important that this crisis should not be misread as an indictment of communal relations, for what is in crisis in Africa is not communalism per se but a model of communal relations that for more than a century has been under attack, and which, even at its best, was not based on fully egalitarian relations. In the past, women

may not have been burned as witches by their husbands' kin when they tried to hold on to the land left to them, as is happening today in Mozambique, but customary laws have often discriminated against them, both with regard to land inheritance and even land use. It is in response to this discrimination that over the last decade, as L. Muthoni Wanyeki has documented in *Women and Land in Africa* (2003), a women's movement has grown in Africa to demand land reform and land rights for women. But this movement will not succeed in a context where the women making land claims or insisting on holding on to the land they have acquired are treated as witches. Worse yet, this movement can be used to justify the kind of land reform that the World Bank is promoting, which replaces land redistribution with land titling and legalization. Some feminists may believe that titling gives women more security or can prevent the land disputes that have often being the source of witch-hunting and other forms of warfare in rural Africa. This belief, however, is an illusory one, since the land law reform that the World Bank and other developers—such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the British government—have promoted will only benefit foreign investors, while leading to more rural debt, more land alienation, and more conflicts among the dispossessed.[46] What is needed, instead, are new forms of communalism guaranteeing an egalitarian access to land and other communal resources, one in which women are not penalized if they do not have children, if the children they have are not male, if they are old and can no longer procreate, or are widowed and without male children coming to their defense. In other words, feminist movements, inside and outside of Africa, should not let the demise and failure of a patriarchal form of communalism be used to legitimize the privatization of communal resources. They should instead engage in the

construction of fully egalitarian commons, learning from the example of the organizations that have taken this path: Via Campesina, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement) in Brazil, the Zapatistas—all of which have seen the building of women's power and solidarity as a fundamental condition of success.

Indeed, from the viewpoint of the African village and the women who have been the victims of witch-hunting, we can say that the feminist movement too is at a crossroads and must decide 'which side it is on.' Feminists have devoted much effort during the last two decades to carving a space for women in the institutions, from national governments to the United Nations. They have not always, however, made an equal effort to 'empower' the women who have borne the brunt of economic globalization on the ground, especially rural women. Thus, while many feminist organizations have celebrated the United Nations Decade for Women, they have not heard the cries of the women who, in the same years, were burned as witches in Africa, nor have they asked if 'women's power' is not an empty term when old women can be tortured, humiliated, ridiculed, and killed by the youth of their communities with impunity.

The forces that are instigating the African witch hunts are powerful and will not be easily defeated. Indeed, violence against women will end only with the construction of a different world where people's lives are not 'eaten up' for the sake of the accumulation of wealth. Starting from the present, however, we can tap into the experience that women internationally have gained to see how an effective response can be mounted. Confronted with the constant escalation in the number of women killed by fire in 'dowry murders' by husbands eager to remarry in order to acquire money and the commodities they could not

otherwise afford, Indian women in the 1990s launched a broad educational campaign with street plays, demonstrations, and sit-ins in front of the houses of the murderers or at police stations, to convince the police to arrest the killers.[47] They also made songs and slogans naming and shaming the killers, formed neighborhood groups, and arranged public meetings where men pledged never to ask for a dowry again.[48] Teachers also went into the streets to demonstrate against dowry murders.

These direct-action tactics can be applied also to confront the African witch hunters, who can only continue to torture and to kill as long as they believe that have a license to do so. African women are particularly well equipped for mounting this type of mobilization, as in the confrontation with colonial power they have forged forms of struggle and tactics that to this day ensure that their voice can be heard. What should be organized, for instance, is a movement of women who 'sit' on witch hunters, disrobe in front of them, and perform shaming acts of staged 'incivility,' as African grassroots women's movements have been known to do.[49] They should do so at the doorsteps of both the offenders in Africa and the international agencies in the world's capitals, where the policies that are driving the witch hunts are formulated.

Clearly, 'sitting on the man' can only be a beginning. But it is important that we recognize that there is much that women and feminists can do to oppose these new witch hunts and that such intervention is urgently needed. For in a social context in which communal relations are falling apart, few will have the courage to come to the rescue of women and old men when they are surrounded by a gang of youths with ropes and gasoline in their hands. This means that if women do not organize against these witch hunts, no one else will, and the terror campaign will continue under the form of witch-hunting or in new forms.

One lesson we can draw from the return of witch-hunting is that this form of persecution is no longer bound to a specific historic time. It has taken on a life of its own, so that the same mechanisms can now be applied to different societies, whenever there are people in them that have to be ostracized and dehumanized. Witchcraft accusations, in fact, are the ultimate mechanism of alienation and estrangement, as they turn the accused—still primarily women—into monstrous beings dedicated to the destruction of their communities, therefore making them undeserving of any compassion and solidarity.

Notes

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1   One exception is the documentary made by the Indian filmmaker Rakhi Verma, entitled *The Indian Witch Hunt*, which won best film at the ShowReal Asia 2 Awards held in Singapore on April 20, 2005; Savvy Soumya, "Film on Witches Casts a Spell—Documentary Features in the Nomination List of Magnolia Award," *Telegraph*, May 12, 2005, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1050512/asp/jharkhand/story_4722935.asp. Now in India, as reported by Rachel Nuwer, "a female-led grassroots movement is pushing back against this practice. Small groups of local women [have] added abolishing witch-hunts to their agenda"; https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/women-shut-down-deadly-witch-hunts-in-india-yes-that-still-happens-26095379/;

"Women Shut Down Deadly Witch Hunts in India (Yes, That Still Happens)," *Smithsonian.org*, September 5, 2012, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/women-shut-down-deadly-witch-hunts-in-india-yes-that-still-happens-26095379/#m63SL6CXqA04c8ot.99.

2   According to Justus M. Ogembo, just in the district of Kiisi, by April 9 2002, "over a hundred people had been brutally murdered"; *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii, Southwestern Kenya* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 2. More people have been murdered after that date; see "'Witches' Burnt to Death in Kenya," *BBC News*, May 21, 2008, accessed June 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7413268.stm, reporting on

the murder of eleven people, eight women and three men in May 2008.

3   Mensah Adinkrah, *Witches, Witchcraft and Violence in Ghana* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 5.

4   This thesis is so common that it is hard to select an individual source; see, among others: Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Work: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Justus M. Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*; Elias K. Bongmba, "Witchcraft and the Christian Church: Ethical Implications," in *Imagining Evil: Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007). However, in the same Haar volume, Stephen Ellis points out that "Contemporary African 'witchcraft' is . . . like many other aspects of life there, neither authentically African nor a pure imposition. It is an unfortunate amalgam created in part by comparing religious ideas and practices from different places"; "Witching Times: A Theme in the Histories of Africa and Europe," 35.

5   This figure is from Karen Palmer, *Spellbound: Inside West Africa's Witch Camps* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 18, in which the author reports on a 2007 visit she made to some of the 'witch camps.' It represents a substantial growth with respect to the figure of 1,000 given in Allison Berg, *Witches in Exile* (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2004), DVD, 79 min.

6   Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, 106–8, 65–81.

7   Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist* 26, no. 2 (May 1999): 282.

8   Richard Petraitis, "The Witch Killers of Africa," *The Secular Web*, 2003, accessed May 11, 2018, https://infidels.org/library/modern/richard_petraitis/witch_killers.html.

9   Hugo F. Hinfelaar, "Witch-Hunting in Zambia and International Illegal Trade," in Haar, *Imagining Evil*, 233.

10 Elom Dovlo, "Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana," in Haar, *Imagining Evil*, 70, among others, notes a rise of witchcraft practices and anti-witchcraft shrines in Ghana after the advent of colonialism, in particular after the development of the cocoa industry that created new class divisions. In the 1950s, a witch-finding movement developed and spilled over into Nigeria's Yoruba land that "persecuted thousands of women," apparently triggered by the rise in the price of cocoa on the world market.

It was sponsored by businessmen who feared the competition of the well-organized female traders and saw their economic success as a threat to male authority in the household. Andrew H. Apter, "Atinga Revisited: Yoruba Witchcraft and the Cocoa Economy, 1950–1951," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 111–28.

11   Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, "Anger as a Metaphor of Witchcraft: The Relation between Magic, Witchcraft, and Divination among the Mupun of Nigeria," in Haar, *Imagining Evil*, 181.

12   Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, 125.

13   Liazzat Bonate, "Women's Land Rights in Mozambique: Cultural, Legal and Social Contexts," in *Women and Land in Africa: Culture, Religion and Realizing Women's Rights*, ed. L. Muthoni Wanyeki (London: Zed Books, 2003), 11, 74, 115.

14   Bina Awargal, in *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, finds the same pattern in South Asia: "In communities where women never held land, such rights tend to generate hostility—divorces, accusations of witchcraft, threats, attacks, torture, even murder"; quoted in Wanyeki, *Women and Land in Africa*, 74.

15   Hinfelaar, "Witch-Hunting in Zambia and International Illegal Trade," 238.

16   Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, ix.

17   Jane Parish, "From the Body to the Wallet: Conceptualizing Akan Witchcraft at Home and Abroad" *Journal of the Royal, Anthropology Institute* 6, no. 3 (September 2000): 487, 489–90, 494, accessed June 13, 2018, http://www.urbanlab.org/articles/Parish,%20Jane%202000%20From%20the%20body%20to%20the%20wallet.pdf. Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, "Witchcraft in the 'Politics of Belonging,'" *African Studies Review* 41, no. 3 (December 1998): 69–91; Wim Van Binsbergen, "Witchcraft in Modern Africa as Virtualized Boundary Condition of the Kinship Order," in *Witchcraft Dialogues: Anthropology and Philosophical Exchanges*, Africa Series no. 76, eds. George Clement Bond and Diane M. Ciekawi (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2001), 212–62.

18   Luise White, in *Speaking with Vampires: Rumors and History in Colonial Africa*, reports that in colonial Kenya, Tanganyika, and Northern Rhodesia, in the 1930s, many rumors circulated among the African population about whites sucking the blood

of black people or having pits in their homes where they kept them before feeding upon them.

19 Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 281–85.

20 In this sense, Ousseina Alidou has spoken of the "militarization" of the African youth, referring to the radical dispossession young people have suffered as a result of structural adjustment and their consequent readiness to be recruited as mercenaries for military activities that lead to them harming their own communities; paper presented at the Peace Action Forum on Africa, Judson Church, New York, September 17, 2007.

21 Louis Okamba, "Saving the Elderly from Prejudice and Attacks," *African Agenda* 2, no. 2 (1999): 35.

22 Okamba, "Saving the Elderly from Prejudice and Attacks."

23 Okamba.

24 Hinfelaar, "Witch-Hunting in Zambia and International Illegal Trade," 236.

25 Comaroff and Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction," 285.

26 Jeremy Vine, "Congo Witch-Hunt's Child Victims," *BBC Online*, December 22, 1999, accessed May 7, 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/575178.stm; Tracy McVeigh, "Children Are Targets in Nigerian Witch Hunt," *Guardian*, December 9, 2007, accessed May 7, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/dec/09/tracymcveigh.theobserver; Sharon LaFraniere, "African Crucible: Cast as Witches, then Cast Out," *New York Times*, November 15, 2007, accessed May 7, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/15/world/africa/15witches.html?mtrref=www.google.ca&gwh=28AD6CFD84ECC24A6881B8DA5FA9BEC8&gwt=pay.

27 Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, 109.

28 There has been a debate in Ghana over the nature of these 'camps,' whether or not they should be allowed to stay, and whether they provide women a genuine shelter or represent a violation of human rights; see Dovlo, "Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana," 79. Female members of parliament insisted first that they should be closed, but they abandoned this project after visiting the camps and meeting the women taking refuge in them.

29 Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, 21.

30 Dovlo, "Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana," 83.

31 Mark Auslander, "Open the Wombs: The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witch-Finding," in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 172.

32 Petraitis, "The Witch Killers of Africa."

33 Dovlo, "Witchcraft in Contemporary Ghana," 83.

34 Berg, *Witches in Exile*.

35 Ogembo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii*, 1.

36 Andrew H. Apter "Atinga Revisited," 97.

37 Ambreena Manji, *The Politics of Land Reform in Africa: From Communal Land to Free Markets* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

38 Heidi Gengenbach, "'I'll Bury You in the Border!' Land Struggles in Post-war Facazisse (Magude District), Mozambique," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, no. 1 (March 1998): 7–36.

39 In the Anchilo area of Mozambique—a place where women insisting on their land rights have been accused of being witches—out of thirty-six women interviewed, only seven responded that they would sell the trees they inherited, while the others said that they would want to keep them for their children; see Bonate, "Women's Land Rights in Mozambique," 113. As Mark Auslander writes: "Dr. Moses [the witch finder] and his followers appeared to value greatly the photos I gave them. In several occasions the Doctor indicated his hope to use these materials in a television series." But Auslander admits that "on some occasions I unquestionably increased the anguish of the participant"; see "Open the Wombs," 190.

40 Auslander, "Open the Wombs," 170.

41 Auslander, 182.

42 Parish, "From the Body to the Wallet," 487–501.

43 Auslander, "Open the Wombs," 179.

44 Auslander, 167.

45 Auslander, 174.

46 Manji, *The Politics of Land Reform in Africa*, 35–46, 99–132.

47 Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800–1990* (London: Verso, 1997), 120–21.

48 Kumar, *The History of Doing*, 122.

49 Susan Diduk, "The Civility of Incivility: Grassroots Political Activism, Female Farmers and the Cameroon State," *African Studies Review* 47, no. 2 (September 2004): 27–54.

Conclusion

This book, which revisits some of the themes of *Caliban and the Witch* and their relationship to the surge of violence against women that we are now witnessing, attempts to answer questions that are crucial for any social movement.

Why should women, from whose bodies each person who has ever lived has come into this world, who not only procreate but nourish children and daily reproduce their families, be the target of so much violence, including new witch hunts?

As I have argued, especially in Part 2, an aspect of the contemporary attack on women, especially black, formerly colonized, proletarian women is directed against the potential mothers of rebel youth, who reject dispossession and struggle to reclaim what generations of enslaved communities have produced. In this sense there is a continuity between the attack on black/'poor' women and the politics of mass incarceration the U.S. government is pursuing domestically and across the world. Women in the so-called Third World are also made objects of violence by economic policies that define them as persons of no use, as burdens to their communities, and as defenders of forms of production (such as subsistence farming) presumably contrary to the common good. A key factor in the new surge of violence against women is also the

increasing reliance of capital accumulation on the practice of 'extractivism,' which requires the displacement of targeted communities and the destruction of their means of reproduction.

But the attack on women comes above all from capital's need to destroy what it cannot control and degrade what it most needs for its reproduction. This is the body of women, for even in this age of superautomation, no work and no production would exist except for what is the result of our gestation. Test-tube babies do not exist—this is a discursive formula that we should reject as an expression of a masculine search for procreation outside the female body, which is the one frontier capital has yet to conquer.

Witch-hunting in all its different forms is also a powerful means to destroy communal relations, injecting the suspicion that underneath the neighbor, the friend, the lover hides another person, lusting for power, sex, wealth, or simply wanting to commit evil deeds. As in the past, this fabrication is essential at a time when the revulsion against capitalism and resistance to its exploitation is growing in every part of the world. It is crucial then that we fear each other, suspect each other's motives, approach our fellow beings with nothing in mind but what we can gain from them or the damage they may inflict upon us.

For this reason, it is important that we strive to understand the history and logic of witch-hunting and the many ways in which it is perpetuated in our time; for it is only by keeping this memory alive that we can prevent it from being turned against us.

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Index

"Passim" (literally "scattered") indicates intermittent discussion of a topic over a cluster of pages.

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PM Press was founded at the end of 2007 by a small collection of folks with decades of publishing, media, and organizing experience. PM Press co-conspirators have published and distributed hundreds of books, pamphlets, CDs, and DVDs. Members of PM have founded enduring book fairs, spearheaded victorious tenant organizing campaigns, and worked closely with bookstores, academic conferences, and even rock bands to deliver political and challenging ideas to all walks of life. We're old enough to know what we're doing and young enough to know what's at stake.

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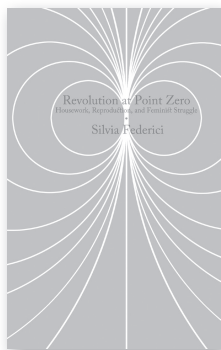
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Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle

Silvia Federici

Written between 1974 and 2012, *Revolution at Point Zero* collects forty years of research and theorizing on the nature of housework, social reproduction, and women's struggles on this terrain—to escape it, to better its conditions, to reconstruct it in ways that provide an alternative to capitalist relations.

Indeed, as Federici reveals, behind the capitalist organization of work and the contradictions inherent in "alienated labor" is an explosive ground zero for revolutionary practice upon which are decided the daily realities of our collective reproduction.

Beginning with Federici's organizational work in the Wages for Housework movement, the essays collected here unravel the power and politics of wide but related issues including the international restructuring of reproductive work and its effects on the sexual division of labor, the globalization of care work and sex work, the crisis of elder care, the development of affective labor, and the politics of the commons.

"Finally we have a volume that collects the many essays that over a period of four decades Silvia Federici has written on the question of social reproduction and women's struggles on this terrain. While providing a powerful history of the changes in the organization of reproductive labor, Revolution at Point Zero *documents the development of Federici's thought on some of the most important questions of our time: globalization, gender relations, the construction of new commons."*
—Mariarosa Dalla Costa, coauthor of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* and *Our Mother Ocean*

Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons

Silvia Federici with a Foreword by Peter Linebaugh

ISBN: 978-1-62963-569-9
$19.95   240 pages

Silvia Federici is one of the most important contemporary theorists of capitalism and feminist movements. In this collection of her work spanning over twenty years, she provides a detailed history and critique of the politics of the commons from a feminist perspective. In her clear and combative voice, Federici provides readers with an analysis of some of the key issues and debates in contemporary thinking on this subject.

Drawing on rich historical research, she maps the connections between the previous forms of enclosure that occurred with the birth of capitalism and the destruction of the commons and the "new enclosures" at the heart of the present phase of global capitalist accumulation. Considering the commons from a feminist perspective, this collection centers on women and reproductive work as crucial to both our economic survival and the construction of a world free from the hierarchies and divisions capital has planted in the body of the world proletariat. Federici is clear that the commons should not be understood as happy islands in a sea of exploitative relations but rather autonomous spaces from which to challenge the existing capitalist organization of life and labor.

"Silvia Federici's theoretical capacity to articulate the plurality that fuels the contemporary movement of women in struggle provides a true toolbox for building bridges between different features and different people."
—Massimo De Angelis, professor of political economy, University of East London

"Silvia Federici's work embodies an energy that urges us to rejuvenate struggles against all types of exploitation and, precisely for that reason, her work produces a common: a common sense of the dissidence that creates a community in struggle."
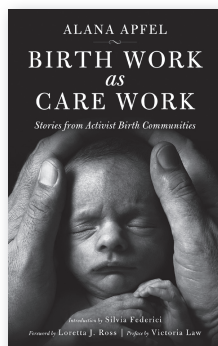—Maria Mies, coauthor of *Ecofeminism*
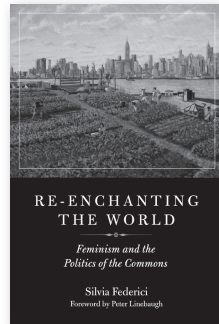
Birth Work as Care Work: Stories from Activist Birth Communities

Alana Apfel with a Foreword by Loretta J. Ross, Preface by Victoria Law, and Introduction by Silvia Federici

ISBN: 978–1–62963–151–6
$14.95   152 pages

Birth Work as Care Work presents a vibrant collection of stories and insights from the front lines of birth activist communities. The personal has once more become political, and birth workers, supporters, and doulas now find themselves at the fore of collective struggles for freedom and dignity.

The author, herself a scholar and birth justice organizer, provides a unique platform to explore the political dynamics of birth work, drawing connections between birth, reproductive labor, and the struggles of caregiving communities today. Articulating a politics of care work in and through the reproductive process, the book brings diverse voices into conversation to explore multiple possibilities and avenues for change.

At a moment when agency over our childbirth experiences is increasingly centralized in the hands of professional elites, *Birth Work as Care Work* presents creative new ways to reimagine the trajectory of our reproductive processes. Most importantly, the contributors present new ways of thinking about the entire life cycle, providing a unique and creative entry point into the essence of all human struggle—the struggle over the reproduction of life itself.

"I love this book, all of it. The polished essays and the interviews with birth workers dare to take on the deepest questions of human existence."
—Carol Downer, cofounder of the Feminist Women's Heath Centers of California and author of *A Woman's Book of Choices*

"This volume provides theoretically rich, practical tools for birth workers and other care workers to collectively and effectively fight capitalism and the many intersecting processes of oppression that accompany it. Birth Work as Care Work *forcefully and joyfully reminds us that the personal is political, a lesson we need now more than ever."*
—Adrienne Pine, author of *Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras*

Women and the Subversion of the Community: A Mariarosa Dalla Costa Reader

Mariarosa Dalla Costa with a Preface by Harry Cleaver
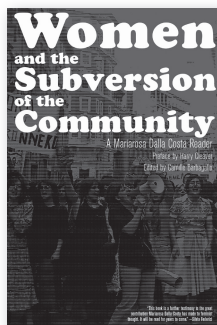
This collection brings together key texts and previously unavailable essays of the influential Italian feminist author and activist Mariarosa Dalla Costa. In recent years there has been both a renewed interest in theories of social reproduction and an explosion of women's struggles and strikes across the world. The collection offers both historical and contemporary Marxist feminist analysis of how the reproduction of labour and life functions under capitalism.

Dalla Costa's essays, speeches, and political interventions provide insight into the vibrant and combative women's movement that emerged in Italy and across the world in the early 1970s. Since the publication of *Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1972), Dalla Costa has been a central figure in the development of autonomist thought in a wide range of anticapitalist and feminist social movements. Her detailed research and provocative thinking deepens our understanding of the role of women's struggles for autonomy and control over their bodies and labour. These essays provide critical and relevant ideas for anticapitalists, antiracists, and feminists who are attempting to build counterpower in the age of austerity.

"This book is a further testimony to the great contribution Mariarosa Dalla Costa has made to feminist thought. It will be read for years to come."
—Silvia Federici, author of *Revolution at Point Zero*

"This publication is a major step in the constitution of a subversive feminist historiography. Mariarosa Dalla Costa's contribution has been at the vanguard of the theorization of the relation between the oppression of women and capitalism."
—Morgane Merteuil, researcher, coeditor of *Pour un féminisme de la totalité*

Birth Strike: The Hidden Fight over Women's Work

Jenny Brown

When House Speaker Paul Ryan urged U.S. women to have more children, and Ross Douthat requested "More babies, please," in a *New York Times* column, they openly expressed what policymakers have been discussing for decades with greater discretion. Using technical language like "age structure," "dependency ratio," and "entitlement crisis," establishment think tanks are raising the alarm: if U.S. women don't get busy having more children, we'll face an aging workforce, slack consumer demand, and a stagnant economy.
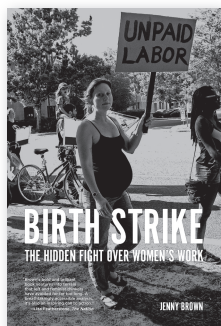
Feminists generally believe that a prudish religious bloc is responsible for the protracted fight over reproductive freedom in the U.S. and that politicians only attack abortion and birth control to appeal to those "values voters." But hidden behind this conventional explanation is a dramatic fight over women's reproductive labor. On one side, elite policymakers want an expanding workforce reared with a minimum of employer spending and a maximum of unpaid women's work. On the other side, women are refusing to produce children at levels desired by economic planners. By some measures our birth rate is the lowest it has ever been. With little access to childcare, family leave, health care, and with insufficient male participation, U.S. women are conducting a spontaneous birth strike.

In other countries, panic over low birth rates has led governments to underwrite childbearing and childrearing with generous universal programs, but in the U.S., women have not yet realized the potential of our bargaining position. When we do, it will lead to new strategies for winning full access to abortion and birth control, and for improving the difficult working conditions U.S. parents now face when raising children.

"Jenny Brown compellingly explains the low U.S. birthrate: those primarily responsible for the labor of bearing and raising children (women) are responding as one should to lousy working conditions—by going on strike! Brown's bold and brilliant book ventures into terrain that left and feminist thinkers have avoided for far too long. A breathtakingly accessible analysis, supported by riveting and intimate testimonials, it's also an inspiring call to action."
—Liza Featherstone, *The Nation*

One Earth, One Humanity vs. the 1%

Vandana Shiva with Kartikey Shiva

ISBN: 978-1-62963-650-4
$18.95   176 pages

Vandana Shiva's struggles on the streets of Seattle and Cancún and in homes and farms across the world have yielded a set of principles based on inclusion, nonviolence, reclaiming the commons, and freely sharing the earth's resources. These ideals, which she calls "earth democracy," serve as an urgent call to peace and as the basis for a just and sustainable future.
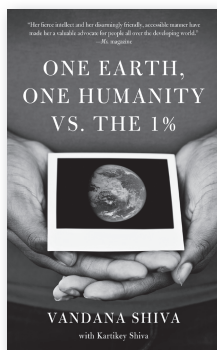
With precision and passion she explores the issues she helped bring to international attention—genetic food engineering, culture theft, natural resource privatization, and the role that unrestricted capitalism has played in the destruction of environments and livelihoods. Unafraid to confront authority and name names, this slim book exposes the global elite, uncovering their links to the rising tide of fundamentalism, violence against women, and planetary death.

"All of us who care about the future of Planet Earth must be grateful to Vandana Shiva. Her voice is powerful, and she is not afraid to tackle those corporate giants that are polluting, degrading, and ultimately destroying the natural world."
—Jane Goodall, UN Messenger of Peace

"Her fierce intellect and her disarmingly friendly, accessible manner have made her a valuable advocate for people all over the developing world."
—*Ms.* magazine

"A rock star in the worldwide battle against genetically modified seeds."
—Bill Moyers

"Shiva is a burst of creative energy, an intellectual power."
—*The Progressive*

"Her great virtue as an advocate is that she is not a reductionist. Her awareness of the complex connections among economy and nature and culture preserves her from oversimplification. So does her understanding of the importance of diversity."
—Wendell Berry